A FRIEND OF MINE

DAVID P. McASTOCKER, S.J.

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By

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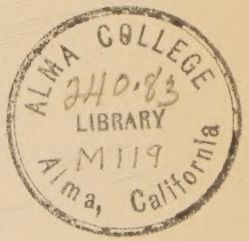
Once Upon a Time
My Ain Laddie
Flash Lights
and Others



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To

S. M. C.

A friend of "A Friend of Mine"

"We shall say much and yet shall want words, but the sum of our words is, He is all" (Ecclus. xliii. 29).

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

I met up with my Friend rather unexpectedly. For years I had given little consideration to the road I was traveling. Of course, I knew in some vague sort of way that I was a journeyman bound for the Master's Inn at the end of the road. But at that it ended. I took no heed of direction. The flowers by the roadside were so gorgeous, fragrant, and alluring that I forgot all else save their beauty—their desirability. The sun, too, was so warm and refreshing that one almost unconsciously came to pay more attention to the attractions of the road than to the road itself.

Then suddenly the brightness vanished, the light disappeared, the mists crept up about me, and I found myself in utter darkness. You know how it is when you go from a well-lighted room into dark night—you just cannot see. You stumble hither and yon. It was then a hand grasped mine—the hand of my Friend.

All through the dark hours that have followed, He has guided me, and I have come in some in-

adequate, imperfect way to know Him. This friendship has meant so much to me that I no longer ask roses and sunshine for my fellow journeymen. I simply pray that in the night of sorrow which comes alike to all, they may meet up with my Friend.

And that you, kind reader, may the more easily recognize and the more firmly trust this Friend, I am going to describe Him a little more fully to you.

DAVID P. MCASTOCKER, S.J.

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"A friend is one who loves me though he knows me."

A FRIEND OF MINE

I

A SILENT FRIEND

The first characteristic that appealed to me in my Friend was His silence. If one goes, say, from sunlight into a darkened movie house, it is the most natural impulse in the world to expect aid, guidance. It is also most fitting that that assistance be of the silent, quiet kind. Words shatter your illusions, your ideals.

The night my Friend grasped me by the hand no words were spoken. And yet there was perfect understanding. Somehow this silent guidance meant more to me than a plethora of words. To begin, it greatly increased my confidence in Him. Guides who really know the dangers of mountain trails are proverbially silent men. They realize that it is much better to err in speaking too little than in speaking too much.

I particularly remember a moonlight night years ago. The rectory was close to the highway, and just after the clock had signaled one in the morning, I happened to look out. Four Indian boys were quietly walking up the middle of the

road. You see, sidewalks were too noisy for them. Suddenly an owl hooted. Automatically they stopped in their tracks. No words were spoken, and I am not overstating facts when I declare that they never moved for three or four minutes. Then, when they had assured themselves as to the cause of the commotion, they silently continued up the road and vanished in the misty moonlight.

Those Indian boys had inherited from their forbears the value and necessity of silence. Their ancestors had been saved from many an ambush just because they recognized the preciousness of this virtue.

We, too, likewise, should soon discover that we had eluded, stripped ourselves of the vast majority of our imperfections and sins, did we but follow the rule of the trail—did we but fully comprehend that we are in enemy territory and cannot, without risks to ourselves and others, court discovery and ruin by neglecting silence.

Our self-sufficient twentieth century looks down with amused tolerance at the medievalism of former eras. The modern world can explain almost any religious phenomenon that has occurred in the past; that is, it can explain it away,

or rather endeavor to do so. The flair of monasticism that gripped Christians in the early centuries and blossomed and bore fruit in the Middle Ages is (to it) a mystery easily solved. It was nothing more than a highly contagious disease that, like influenza, or golf, perhaps, sweeps everything before it. The world cannot sensibly see it as a serum (which it actually was) saving mankind from both materialistic aggrandizement and moral turpitude.

When it comes to curtailment of speech and the practice of meditation, the world perceives a real enigma. Why did pagan and monk alike put such a high value on silence? There they flounder; there they meet the Gordian knot. There is, to these worldlings, no explanation. It is inexplainable! It is inexplainable how rational men should so lose sight of the fitness of things as to single out and unduly emphasize the advantages of one virtue to the detriment of the others. The actions of the different founders of religious orders in drastically punishing all infractions of silence, are to them an indication of insanity. The advice of St. Ignatius to provincials, relative to the importance of silence in determining the spiritual temperature of houses during

visitation, is decidedly preposterous! It rather connotes an abnormal mind. Such is the line of argumentation followed. Yet it never dawns on them that it might be barely possible that the fault is on their side.

Sciolists never appear to discover their own limitations. The reason is that their eyes are on others, not on themselves. Did they turn the light inward and ponder in silence over their own wretched condition, they might easily solve the riddle; they might easily learn from experience the value of silence, but, of course, in that case they would cease to be sciolists.

Nor is this lack of appreciation of the value of silence confined to free thinkers and to those outside the pale of the Church. Many Catholics, and even Religious, are infected with the same virus. These good people can plainly see that it is perilous in the extreme for an aviator not to have, say, all his muscles under control; that he does wrong, for instance, in flying while intoxicated; yet they cannot see the dire need of control over the mouth and tongue to avoid moral death.

Negligence in the former case may mean the death of a few; while carelessness in the latter can easily cause moral devastation and ruin to

thousands upon thousands. The American urge to be always doing something is, I fancy, to some extent the cause of our antipathy toward silence. Action, and then more action, appears to be the watchword of the hour. We cannot perceive that it is much better to do absolutely nothing than busy ourselves with a destructive work. The man who throws a bomb is, no doubt, keeping himself occupied, but, at the same time, who will deny that he is seriously injuring others. The world would progress faster did that individual keep quiet—preserve silence.

That is precisely the reason why we are erecting many skyscrapers but producing few saints. We are working on matter, and matter is mortal. It will come to naught. The teeth of time that gnaw the temple are powerless against its god. Today, the shrines of India have crumbled; lizards creep among the fallen monoliths; yet the songs which generation upon generation of Indian mothers sang are heard today as they were centuries ago. The body dies and withers to dust, but the soul marches on. Matter yields to unrelenting time; dreams are immortal. They do not die. He who considers a hard, gritty brick as more real than the thing imagined, is doomed

to disillusionment, for a dream—a dream is more enduring than court testimony. And dreams, let us ever bear in mind, are born in silence—in solitude.

Columbus nurtured a thought of a new passage to India, and with it, stumbled upon America. Dante, exiled from his earthly lar and penates, dreams of a home beyond the stars. The vision of these abodes in another life became more real to him than his own existence. He just cannot help describing them to his fellow men, and, from this frail flower of the imagination, comes the perfect fruit—an immortal trilogy from the "Man Who Was in Hell."

Ah, foster your dreams; love alike the Isle of Dreams, Solitude! Benedict once caught an airy nothing, fructified it in the Cave of Subiaco, and lo! piety and learning swept the West like a forest fire. Francis of Assisi captured an elusive idea of the riches of poverty. He milled over this thought in the Cave on Mt. Alverno until it lived, breathed, and flourished as a renaissance of the soul that bids fair never to be equaled.

The soldier-poet, Ignatius, caught a vision of a spiritual army to combat the onslaughts of Luther and his clan. Daily meditation in a

Cavern at Manresa, fanned that vital spark. It germinated, grew. As a consequence, the ravages of the so-called Reformation were stemmed, and Francis Xavier, Aloysius, Stanislaus, and a host of others perfumed the world with the sweet aroma of their lives.

To accomplish anything solidly good, we, too, must have a cave—a place apart, whither we may retire at certain stated periods. It need not be separate from our ordinary abode. "In our own hearts lies the El Dorado we scour the world to find!" Silence may be enjoyed in the midst of tumult and noise. It consists in keeping a little upper room in our hearts for the Guest we love. It need not be an elaborate chamber luxuriously furnished. No! But it must be clean, neat, free from spot or stain.

Here, when our Friend favors us with a call, we may sit and converse with Him. Not necessarily in so many words. Love speaks a language of the heart, not of the lips. As the old French contemplative, who was a parishioner of the Curé of Ars, replied, when asked what he did during the long hours spent before the Blessed Sacrament, "I look at Him; He looks at me."

"I look at Him!" I look at Him, and ponder

that from all eternity He determined to save the human race, yet waited in silence for centuries and centuries to roll by before accomplishing this stupendous act. I see Him appearing for the first time, not in the palace of a king, but in a cave. I see Him shunning the world, avoiding the crowds whenever such a course does not interfere with His mission. I recall the lonely nights on the Mountain, far away "From the madding crowd's ignoble strife"; I hear His words: "Let your speech be yea, yea; no, no, and that which is over and above these is of evil." I vision again that last solemn tragedy, enacted not in Jerusalem but "outside the walls," where to the end—to death itself, He champions His love for "Lady Solitude."

"I look at Him." I study His actions and observe that, though a lover of silence, Christ never fails to speak out fearlessly when duty or vindication of the neighbors' honor requires it. The Wise Man tells us that there are times when speech is unseasonable, but he also says there are times when silence is wrong and even cruel. If there is much said that should never have been breathed, there is also much that ought to have free utterance which is never spoken.

Christ is an example in this as in all other difficulties. When duty demanded, He spoke—and spoke plainly. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes might easily have infected the common people. It was necessary to warn them. He did so in no uncertain terms. Before the entire populace He heralded these double-dealers as "a brood of vipers," as "monuments, fair without but within filled with dead men's bones."

This fearless adherence to duty won Him the implacable enmity of the powerful, and resulted eventually in His passion and death. As God He thoroughly realized this result long before it actually occurred, yet never once did expediency guide His mode of conduct and cause Him to suppress the word that should be spoken.

Another occasion that always evoked stern words from the Christ was whenever some poor creature, helpless to defend herself, was rashly judged and cruelly treated by those more powerful than she. The conversion of Mary Magdalen is a case in point. The supercilious attitude of Simon, the Pharisee, his gross neglect of Christ, his refusal to extend even the ordinary courtesies to the illustrious Guest within his walls—these affronts the Savior bore in silence. But when

the Pharisee dared pass judgment upon and condemn a helpless woman of the streets, the gentle Lord refused at once to allow the insult to pass. Immediately He called the host to task: "Simon, I have something to say to thee." No beating about the bush, no side-stepping, but straight to the matter at issue the Christ proceeded. A helpless human being had been ill-treated, and naturally, the wrong ought to be righted without delay. And thus, in one of the most vivid parables in the Gospel, Christ brings home to the tyrant Simon the enormity of his guilt in rashly judging by external appearances. The gentle Master at the same time shows us of the twentieth century how fearless we should be in defending the honor of an absent or a helpless fellow creature.

"He looks at me!" I shall beg Him to throw the light of His grace upon me, that I may see my defects and sins as they are with all their horrible circumstances clearly lit up—that I may be wholly convinced of the harm wrought in my life by the nonobservance of silence. I will reflect on the past. I will see that my sins of anger, uncharitableness, of omission—these came mostly from infractions of silence. I shall see, too, by

the light of His countenance, that the great majority of my negative defects—the amenities I fail to experience in religious life—my desolation of soul, the ennui that is mine, my lack of fervor, my distaste for the things I should like, which, too, I swore I *would* like, (*Dominus pars haereditatis meae*)—these also arise principally from lack of solitude, lack of meditation.

Then a resolution will spring from my heart—a resolution gentle in its humility as the soft down on the wings of an albatross, but strong, too, with the strength that guides the destinies of the stars—that I also shall become a lover of silence, a dreamer of golden dreams. And, if I keep silence as a constant companion on the road, I can well be assured that the dangers will be few and light, that the infinite strength of the great Christ shall somehow be communicated to me. I, too, shall become a person of power, able to accomplish things in a quiet way. Shallow streams are always chattering along life's way, but the deep rivers never murmur or complain, and yet, withal, they cannot be withstood. They carry everything before them. If one course be closed, they plow out another until—until they reach their destination—the sea.

II

A PERSONAL FRIEND

When a lover meets for the first time the beloved at the appointed trysting place, each is surprisingly conscious of the other's presence, though it may not be possible for one actually to see the other. In some vague way this simile describes my feeling on meeting my Friend. As a sudden flash of lightning reveals objects we know to be about but of which we have heretofore failed to take cognizance, so I suddenly became vividly aware of a beloved Presence that meant more to me than all the wealth of Indus and Orm.

Does God think of me individually? Is He interested in my petty hopes and ambitions—in the daily minutiæ of life? Yes! Unequivocably yes! If He, in His infinite solicitude, knows when a sparrow falls to the ground, can we doubt that He watches over and cherishes in a special way those creatures who are made to His own image and likeness—endowed with an immortal soul!

The dumb beast takes its parent for granted, reposes confidence in her, submits to her. Its

whole existence centers about her. But it is not so with human beings. "The ox knoweth its owner, and the ass its master's crib, but Israel hath not known Me and My people have not understood."

A dreadful narcosis paralyzes our faculties when it comes to God and our relations to Him. The things that are unseen we erroneously consider as unreal, as a huge mental phantasmagoria. And yet, though we cannot see the wind, the electric current, the dreaded earthquake, who will be so illogical as to deny their existence?

When Christ walked over the waters to the apostles laboring in the boat, the greater number of them thought Him to be a phantasm. To them the waves were real; the wind was real, but the central figure of all was a chimera, a will-o'-the-wisp. Modern inventions and improvements have not greatly changed this concept of the majority of the human race as respects Christ. To them He is still a phantasm—something unreal. In point of fact, though it may appear far-fetched, it is nevertheless true that monuments erected in our principal cities, as the pagans did of old in Athens, to the Unknown God, would not at all be dissonant from the ideas we generally en-

tertain of the Creator of the universe. In practice, at least, we take it for granted that He cannot be known by us. And herein lies our greatest obstacle toward establishing intimate relations with Him. One has no inclination toward cultivating an acquaintance which he feels reasonably sure will never blossom into a warm friendship.

Another error into which we almost unconsciously fall is that of considering Christ as an historical character who lived and died some twenty centuries ago, rather than as a living, loving Friend, deeply interested in us and our present-day problems and difficulties. "Jesus Christ yesterday, today, and the same forever. . . . You shall be carried at the breast and upon the knees; as one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you."

When we have thoroughly persuaded ourselves that we have not only the power but a duty to be on close terms with Christ, our worst deterrent is past. Since possessing the two elements, "I can" and "I should," it is not so very difficult a task to arouse the will and firmly aver, "I will." One who honestly and perseveringly determines on a course of action, can overcome an infinitude of obstacles and eventually attain his objective.

Most of us are familiar with the incident in Scott's *Lady of the Lake* where Fitz-James confides to the Highland Clansman who is guiding him along the side of Benledi that his dearest desire on earth is to cross paths with the redoubtable Roderick Dhu and all his clan.

> "Have then thy wish!
> Instant through copse and heath arose
> Bonnets and spears and bended bows.
> How say'st thou now?
> These are clan-Alpine's warriors true!
> And Saxon,—I am Roderick Dhu."

In other words, when God gives us the liberty to choose, He will not withhold our choice from us. This is doubly true of wishes concerning the soul. The Savior's words are unequivocal on the subject: "Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you." Not only are these words plain—they are emphatic. The three different ways of insisting on the same thought is beautifully illustrated in the above text. It is the old Hebrew manner of compelling attention and accentuating an idea, of which Christ on other occasions made use with telling effect. Moreover, these are the

words of God Himself. Do we reflect sufficiently on this? I fear we do not, or else the words of the Master would move us more than they actually do.

Whenever a mere human being makes a promise both large and difficult to fulfill, we are accustomed to take his words in a restricted sense, with a grain of salt as the saying goes, but the Savior of earth not merely says that those who pray honestly and perseveringly will obtain their wishes, but He, the Omnipotent God, underwrites this statement. He stands behind it, and He has proved on innumerable occasions the truthfulness of it.

Let us take an example from His own Blessed Life. We know that the Master came on earth to draw us "by the cords of Adam," to show us concretely how to live our life by righteously living it Himself. Well, one day when the weight and horrible anticipation of the coming passion were pressing heavily upon Him, He showed us the only way out of such conditions. He took the favorite three along and went apart from the crowd in order to obtain from prayer the strength and consolation He (as man) so sadly needed. On Thabor He found, as we are all

aware, the aid and courage desired. On Thabor, too, the apostles not only saw a vivid tableau of the advantages, the power, and the reward of prayer, but the Father's Voice, telling them at that moment to pay strict attention to the Teacher sent them, seared their hearts as nothing else could. The example Christ had given them and the words of the Father remained ever green in their memories. Hence it is not strange that, just before His death, we find Peter inditing the following: "For we have not by following artificial fables made known to you the power, and the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His greatness. For He received from God the Father honor and glory: this Voice coming down to Him from the excellent glory: 'This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.' And this Voice we heard brought from heaven when we were with Him in the holy mount. And we have the more firm prophetical word whereunto you do well to attend as to a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts."

In these days, then, of harassing doubts and lack of confidence in a personal God, it might be

well if we, too, kept alive in our hearts the efficacy of prayer—if we reminded ourselves that today, as in the days of yore, there is manna in the desert for those who have the courage to ask for it—that the arm of God is not shortened, that He is as powerful now as when He divided the waters of the Red Sea and commanded the sun to stand still—that, in a word, He can readily be known by those who truly desire to know Him.

After convincing ourselves of the facility by which we may link our lives with the life of Christ—after bringing home to ourselves, too, the desirability of such a course—the advantages that necessarily will accrue from such a sublime friendship—after all these things have been done, it is well to view this subject from another angle; namely, from the viewpoint of Christ Himself. Seen from this coign of vantage the scene is pathetic in the extreme. The lonely Master yearns for our affections, our friendship, our love, and, nevertheless, He is invariably denied this homage due Him from His creatures.

On memory's wall is a well-defined picture of a boyhood scene that always reminds me of the loneliness and abandonment of Christ. We were

some eighteen or nineteen youngsters in all, and unanimously we had decided to spend the afternoon playing baseball. A disparaging remark about one of the boys present gained weight when another lad spoke out his mind against him. A third confirmed the first and the second, and then in a few moments, without even a trial or opportunity to defend himself, the luckless boy was driven from the crowd, like a pariah, a leper. He walked slowly away with tears in his eyes to a hillock in the vicinity and from there wistfully gazed at his former companions in the midst of their sport. Somehow we did not enjoy our play on that particular afternoon. Our consciences were ill at ease; for we were keenly aware that an injustice had been committed, though none appeared to have courage enough to rectify the mistake.

In those days we had in our little coterie a boy who went by the name of "Buddy." He was too small to play baseball and yet he was perfectly content to carry water for the older boys because they, in turn, allowed him to pal around with them. Buddy, though a mere slip of a youngster, was, in spite of his stature, a stout-hearted little soul. On that memorable afternoon

he braved the frowns of his elders and went out to speak with the exile. After a time he came back and was quite emphatic in declaring that the exile had been badly treated, that the boys who were to blame should go out and ask his pardon and entreat the injured one to return to camp. And so, indeed, they finally did. There were great rejoicings. The accused lad in a few days became a prime favorite in our exclusive circle.

I have often desired in later years to renew acquaintance with the fearless lad who brought back once more to our happy set a lonesome, tear-dimmed fugitive. But somehow or other he has never crossed my path. Doubtlessly I shall discover him some day in a hidden, far-away, ivy-covered monastery, telling his brother monks about the irresistible attractiveness of the Master. Or else I shall find him, laboring zealously on the missions. But, wherever it be, I am certain that "Buddy" will still be exercising that extraordinary gift of his—he will still be pleading, quietly, good-naturedly, persistently for men to drop their baseless charges against their Brother and Friend, Christ, and take Him back

once more into their hearts and homes, because without Him they may expect no peace.

"Behold, I stand at the gate and knock. If any man shall hear My voice, and open to Me the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

"To him that shall overcome, I will give to sit with Me in My throne as I also have overcome, and am set down with My Father in His throne."

It is within the province of each of us to be other "Buddies"—to be contact men for Christ. But above all and before all, it is essential that we be completely conscious of Christ's personal, individual friendship for us. We cannot "sell" Christ to others until we have "sold" ourselves to Him. This presupposed, it will not be difficult to break down in the hearts of men the many petty misunderstandings in respect to Him, to make Him better known, better loved. And, as a consequence, tired, wayward hearts will seek once more the ways of peace. Peace! Peace!! Today the word is on everyone's lips. The world desires an end of frictions and strifes and wars, and so nations of earth are signing

peace protocols and treaties, but unless the individual hearts of men be won over to the ways of the Prince of Peace, no lasting harmony will reign. It is like building a house on shifting sands. He, and He alone, is our peace. It is our duty to make this peace abound, to pray with the apostle: "And the peace of God which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

III

A FRIEND IN NEED

A rather amusing story is told of a charming old Frenchman who parked his car in a blind alley. An officious policeman sauntered along, and noticing the car, remarked somewhat remonstratively, "You can't park here!"

"Why not?" queried the Frenchman, "this is a *cul-de-sac!*"

"I don't care whether it be a Cadillac or any other make, you can't leave it here," subjoined the officer of the law.

The story is instructive in this that it accentuates a point which is generally relegated to the background, namely, that there are blind alleys in life just as there are along the highways. There are times when, through perhaps unfortunate sets of circumstances, we suddenly discover that we are trapped—that there is no way out. In all probability we are to blame for the quandary in which we are, but the realization of this truth does not lessen our predicament; it only adds to the helplessness of the situation.

It is in aiding cases such as these that the gentle Christ takes special delight. Just the

other day a prisoner at McNeil Island put this truth in rather a novel manner. He, together with many others, had, on the night before, listened to an instruction and then had recited the Rosary. On the following day he received Holy Communion. Shortly after breakfast he met the Father and said:

"There're quite a number of Catholic boys here, Father, but we are all agreed that it is just because we have not been good Catholics that we *are* here."

That man was one of many who had been visited by the Christ just as really and actually as if he had been blind Bartimeus on the road to Jericho on that memorable day when he received his sight and gazed for the first time on the God-man in the flesh.

It is worthy of remark, that in the lives of the men and women delineated in the Gospels, Christ is invariably present whenever they face a crisis.

The woman taken in adultery was doubtlessly to blame for the embarrassing situation in which she found herself. But most assuredly it was a predicament and a serious one at that. In a few moments, unless some unforeseen power intercede,

she would be stoned to death for her sins. Lo! in a flash she perceived the evil of her ways. Memory is very active on such occasions. She recalls the past—her innocent days of girlhood, before the red dragon of passion had stolen away her birthright. Almost unconsciously a prayer wells up from her sin-crusted soul to her ashen lips. She is sorry. And, behold! Christ stands before her and her accusers. "Peace, be still!" The tumult dies in her heart. There is a way out after all. He is the Way.

"Hath no one accused thee?" . . . "Then neither will I. Go in peace."

When the followers of John the Baptist came to Jesus and asked Him if He were the One to come or should they expect another, Christ did not answer them directly. He asked them to step aside and watch Him as He cured all manner of diseases. Then He called them and said: "Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen; the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, to the poor the Gospel is preached."

Above all His miracles and cures, the Christ considers as His greatest achievement the preaching of the Glad Tidings to the poor. And indeed

this does surpass His benefits to mankind as the sun eclipses all the planets in brilliancy. What would this world be without the gentle, refining influence of Christianity? It is impossible to overestimate the benefits of the preaching of Jesus Christ. It is the way out for those in a blind alley. By it He changed, as it were, overnight, a drab, hopeless world, filled with gloom and despair, to a bright, cheerful, lovable abode. And He did this by the soul-stirring doctrines He preached. These sermons, whose every word is a two-edged sword piercing the hearts of men, call attention to another world where there will be surcease from toil and hardship. Spoken as by one having authority, they produced instantaneous effects. The poor became more contented, more at rest, for what did it matter after all to toil-worn hands, if they did not attain to the higher places in the land. They were convinced from the teachings of Christ that they—the poor, the outcast—could accomplish what perhaps the rich could not—the poor could save their immortal souls. What a moral revolution these doctrines caused when first enunciated by the man-God. And what a moral revolution they would bring about today did we

but live out those precepts as we are obliged by our calling to do! What a heavy reckoning must be ours if we refuse to allow those doctrines to influence us as they can and should.

The one thing that Christ hated was mediocrity in spiritual matters, for mediocrity in an affair of such paramount importance can connote but one evil—hypocrisy. If we know—as we do—that there is a life beyond the grave, and yet live for the present only, we are hypocrites, and we are well aware how Christ hated such cowards. An instructed Catholic not living his religion is a stumbling-block to those within and without the fold.

"Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men, for you yourselves do not enter in, and those that are going in, you suffer not to enter."

And our Lord, in no uncertain terms, tells just what will happen to those who profess one way of life and actually follow another.

"But what think you? A certain man had two sons, and coming to the first, he said: 'Son, go work today in my vineyard.'

"And he answering said: 'I wil lnot.' But afterwards, being moved with repentance, he went.

"And coming to the other, he said in like manner. And he answering said: 'I go, Sir,' and he went not.

"Which of the two did their father's will? They say to Him: 'The first.' Jesus saith to them: 'Amen, I say to you, that the publicans and the harlots shall go into the Kingdom of God before you.' "

In reading the above text two different trends of thought strive for supremacy. One is the strict accounting that shall be demanded of every Catholic, and more so, of every Religious because of the very nature of his calling. "Ye are the salt of the earth. If the salt lose its savor wherewith shall it be salted? It is good for nothing any more but to be cast out, and to be trodden on by men."

The other thought is the broad vision and the infinite yearning Christ has for both publican and harlot. He intimately knows that beneath the crusts of ignorance that incase them, and the gusts of passion that sway them—beneath these external wrappings—are hearts ready to respond generously and thrill harmoniously to the touch of the Master. They were weak, it is true, but nevertheless they were poignantly

conscious of their weakness and deeply aware of the strength of their Savior. They knew, moreover, the real meaning of the word *conversion.* They had walked in the ways of sin, and had experienced sin's bitterness and disappointment—and when they turned to God, it was with a whole-hearted sorrow and singleness of purpose that swept all obstacles aside and verified in themselves the words of the Master, "The first shall be last and the last first."

Thus in the Gospels, wherever we find sin, we find sin's enemy, the Christ—the poison and the antidote. Wonder not, then, that Christ loves sinners; for sinners are helpless human derelicts in blind alleys. "And it came to pass as He was sitting at meat in the house, behold many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and His disciples. And the Pharisees, seeing it, said to His disciples: 'Why doth your Master eat with publicans and sinners?' But Jesus, hearing it said: 'They that are in health need not a physician but they that are ill. Go, then, and learn what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For I am not come to call the just but the sinners.' "

The undying love of Christ for sinners is, of

course, best exemplified in the final triumph of the Savior over sin on the hill of Calvary. This scene comes home to us all the more vividly because, on account of our transgressions, we were participants in that terrible tragedy.

Two individuals claim our attention. The God-man first of all. He is exhausted from the fiendish tortures of His enemies, and the pallor of death is on His face. Nevertheless, in spite of the infinitude of His sufferings, He is still the Good Shepherd, seeking the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He loves sinners so much that even in His dying moments, when men wish to be undisturbed and alone in their agony, He selects this propitious time to show them His undying affection. And the other individual? Christ, through His Providence, allows one of the greatest sinners of the day to have the place of honor and to hang on His right side—a notorious murderer, a robber, a highwayman. Sullenly, despairingly, the robber watches the closing tragedy of his ill-spent life. The heroic fortitude and the divine patience of Christ, the gentle Master, somehow ennoble the scene about him. The unselfishness and winsomeness of this Jesus stir something in his own soul. What is it,

he wonders, that makes him think of his boyhood days, when he was young and innocent, generous and true? And then the vileness of his afterlife with its innumerable injustices, its sordidness, its selfishness, smites him as hammers do an anvil. What a mess he had made of life! And then—then he hears the thief on the other side, cursing and vilifying the Christ. The injustice of this brings all his innate generosity to the surface. A moment or two later he hears his own voice as the voice of some strange being saying: "Neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation. And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man hath done no evil." And then, turning to the Christ, he says: "Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy Kingdom." Gone is despair! Gone is the past! Death! Death is no longer something to be feared. It is only an incident. There is no such thing as a blind alley. For whenever we are in dire need, there is the Christ. He is here now. Gently He turns, and His yearning, penetrating eyes meet those of His defender. In a voice scarcely audible, He whispers: "Amen I say to thee this day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise."

No one can recall this dialogue without being moved. No one can ponder upon it without recalling the words of those saints who have never lost their virginal innocence. Now we understand why the Little Flower used to exclaim: "If I were the greatest sinner on earth, I should have all the more confidence in my dealings with the Master." The Master loved sinners, and will continue to do so to the end of the world.

Because of this love, we place a cross above our churches and institutions. In Catholic countries, we generally find a cross at the shrines by the roadsides. Why not? Is He not the Way, as well as the Truth and the Life? What should we do, what could we do in Life without our shrines? To a shrine one takes his aspirations, his difficulties, his resolutions. Why should not the cross be our shrine, too? Why should not every man, every woman, and every child carry a shrine about him in the form of a little cross, and consult it in his difficulties and model his life upon what it teaches?

A few weeks ago I noticed in port a number of sailors from both Oriental and European countries. Though of different nationalities, they all wore a little black silk handkerchief about their

necks. It seems that the custom dates back to the Battle of Trafalgar, and the black silk handkerchief is worn in memory of Nelson.

How fitting it would be if each of us carried a plain little cross in memory of Him Who always has been and always will be our Friend in need.

IV

A STRONG FRIEND

There is a saying in the *Following of Christ* which deserves to be quoted and pondered over more frequently than is actually done. The sentence is this: "I would rather feel compunction than know how to define it."

Similarly one might say that he would rather live the Life of Christ than write a Life of Christ. The generality of Catholics and Religious are content to peruse books *about* the Savior, to meditate on Him, to pray to Him, but these devotions are performed more as an end in themselves than as a means toward an end—which end is, of course, to know, love, and serve Christ just a little bit better each day. Herein lies our mistake. Spiritual readings are good; devotional prayers, earnestly recited, are good, but these exercises were meant primarily as paths and trails leading us, as the star did the Wise Men, to the feet of the Master. If they do not accomplish this, the *raison d'etre* is frustrated.

A person may, for example, read a great deal

about baseball. He may compile prolific statistics anent the subject, and nevertheless know little or nothing about this interesting phase of sport. However, by witnessing one game actually played before his eyes, he will probably acquire more knowledge than by thumbing dozens of books. As the Japanese say: "One look better than two talk."

In like manner, instead of reading so much about the Savior, if we would pick up the New Testament frequently and *see* Christ as He walks through those pages, our knowledge and intimacy with Him would increase a hundredfold.

Take, for instance, the question of strength. I am thinking in particular not of physical, but of moral strength. All will agree that moral courage is sadly lacking in the ordinary run of Christians today. From spiritual writers we learn of the advantages and the necessity of this fortitude. They explain to us in what it consists and in what it does not consist. All well and good. But these readings, as a general rule, do little toward stirring the heart and fortifying the will. Whereas if we picked up the Gospels and actually witnessed our Brother, Christ, going about and unobtrusively and unconcernedly giving heroic

examples of strength in His daily actions, we could certainly acquire this virtue with much less difficulty. It is easy to confuse sternness of character with strength of character. This mistake is often noticed in young Religious, both superiors and inferiors. They fancy sternness and moral courageousness are synonymous. Not at all! In point of fact, to accentuate sternness is oftentimes a pretty fair sign of the absence of strength. A truly strong person has seldom need to be stern.

It is a sad admission, yet nevertheless a true one, that by far the majority of our faults and sins arise from lack of this virtue. Comparatively few sin through malice; the many fall from lack of will power. So obvious is this fact, and so universally acknowledged has it become, that nowadays almost every magazine has an enticing advertisement as to the proper method of developing this much—very much—needed will power. Family life, social life, our very national existence may totter to a fall, and all because we do not possess that steadfastness of purpose so necessary to bring to a happy conclusion the things upon which we have determined. Parents in the family circle do not curb their offspring.

It is much easier to drift with the stream. Conversely, children set aside the authority of father and mother. In education the pupils seek those subjects especially which require less concentration, less will power. Politicians will bond cities and counties, because it is easier to defer the reckoning than endeavor to square accounts in the present. And thus, *da capo,* the play goes on. What St. Paul in his humility averred, we can in truth declare: "I see better things and approve of them but follow the baser ones."

From this universal cataclysm which threatens alike both individuals and nations, there is only one refuge—Jesus Christ. With His strength we can and should cover our weakness. Begin with little things—those actions in our daily lives which we erroneously term of lesser importance, but which must be presumed as perfectly performed before we may essay a more difficult task. Children learn to creep before they walk. The size and the number of such performances should naturally increase as our proficiency increases. "Because thou hast been faithful in a few things I will place thee over many."

We are amazed to see the God-man going through life utterly absorbed in the one great

purpose of performing the Father's will. He runs His course as a giant, allowing nothing to obstruct His path, nothing to turn Him either right or left. He gives us in the concrete what was meant when He dramatically exclaimed: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul!"

This steadfastness of purpose which shines out so brightly in the life of Christ in respect to the *unum necessarium*—the all-important affair of the soul's salvation, may be seen likewise in the so-called smaller actions of the Savior's life. In fact, as we mentioned elsewhere (yet how prone we are to forget it!), the greater supposes the lesser. We climb hills before we attempt mountains. This salutary truth is well illustrated in the early career of Christ.

Just as the whole heavens may be reflected in a wayside pool as well as in the immense ocean, so also in one line may be comprised the deeds of years. Thus we find the Evangelist, in six words, describing the hidden life of Christ. "And He was subject to them!" An Infinite Being submits Himself to finite beings that we may have an example for all time as to the necessity of exercising will power in the training

of character. For thirty years, He—the God of heaven and earth—trained Himself to acts of strength, not because He needed them, but because He intimately knew that we needed them and would need them all the days of our lives. Later in that same hidden life He led for our edification and imitation, we find Him accentuating not only submission to earthly authority, but calling attention to the higher dominion which God possesses over us. For from God all authority descends. Gently, yet firmly, He reminds both Mary and Joseph of this when they seek Him in the temple. "Did you not know I must be about My Father's business?"

Nor is there any compromise in the years that follow. It is always the same. Right is right and wrong is wrong. When scribes endeavor to try Him and Pharisees to heckle Him, He bravely holds the same position and tells them "to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and to God the things that are God's."

A humorously modern version of this world-old truth occurred recently in a broker's office in New York. One of the stenographers complained to the office boy that she had too many bosses and that sometimes their orders con-

flicted. She then asked the lad what course she should steer.

"Mind the boss higher up," he counseled. Sage advice and well worth following! Many pride themselves on being square with their employers and their fellow men, but few seem concerned about being square with God. Yet we cannot be square with the neighbor unless we be square with God—unless we "mind the One higher up"—unless we valiantly strive to be strong—unless we train the will to endure, to conquer.

In the life of my Friend there is a beautiful scene which I often contemplate. It illustrates graphically, yet sweetly, His strength of character. It lends itself so easily to appropriate applications in our modern mode of living, that I fancy we should steadily increase our moral strength did we take this lesson seriously to heart. The day had been a hectic one for the loving Master. The heat was intense; the walking tiresome; the crowds, fatiguing; the sick, extremely trying. Toward sunset the multitudes departed, and the apostles, considerate of the Savior's weariness, endeavored to keep the

stragglers away, so that He might enjoy a few moments repose. Up the dusty road they espy a group of Jewish mothers with their children, hastening toward the Master's resting place. The apostles determine to prevent them from disturbing the Christ. He is worn out, and they wish Him to rest. But He hears the disturbance without and inquires as to the cause. A group of children, they say, are anxious to see Him. Now the Christ might reasonably have told them that His day's work was over, that it was time for the children to be in bed, that He would see them in the morning. But no! weary though He be, He brings His will into play. He forgets all bodily weakness, and gently remonstrates with His disciples:

"Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for the kingdom of heaven is for such!"

The tired business man beset after office hours by importunate callers, the weary teacher appealed to by backward pupils for extra aid, the exhausted nun in the hospital who finds her day's work protracted far into the night, all these have here an example of unselfishness, of

forgetfulness of self in the interests of the neighbor that can and should be imitated. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent bear it away."

In this age of ours especially, wherein modern inventions and improvements serve to pamper and enervate us, it were worse than useless to delude ourselves with the thought that exercises of the will are pleasant and attractive. Indeed, they are not. Quite the contrary. It invariably requires considerable effort on our part to perform steadfastly these actions so difficult to poor, weak human nature. It will, however, lessen our antipathy toward these salutary workings of the will, to bear in mind that our Brother and Leader, Christ, experienced desolation and repugnance in performing the things He had determined upon. Moral bravery does not consist in the absence of fear. The most frightened individual may attain to heights of heroism that a phlegmatic, fearless person may never reach. Bravery is not in feeling no revulsion so much as in conquering revulsion. Herein lies the definition of a saint: "When the fates opposed, he bent them."

The gentle Christ teaches us this lesson in a very pathetic way. It happened toward the end of His career. The shadows of the passion were creeping up around Him. His friends were deserting Him on all sides, and the future looked black indeed. Excruciating sufferings, an ignominious death awaited Him in Jerusalem. The intensely human Christ shuddered at the holocaust required of Him. And thus, after acquiring strength and courage in prayer, the Christ, as the Evangelist so well describes it, "set His face to go toward Jerusalem." In spite of the shudderings of human nature, in spite of the mental anguish He knew to be in store for Him, in spite of all, He resolutely and heroically faced the issue.

Nor may we expect to travel an easier way. Human nature will repine. There will be difficulties, obstacles of all kinds, heartburnings, revulsions. But by the example of the great, strong Christ, we can become strong and courageous, too. And after a time, through numberless exercises of our will, the repugnance we feel will be lessened; the difficulties, smaller. After the storm comes a great calm.

The calm we shall enjoy will be as a reward for our valiant fighting. It will consist in nothing external—nothing to attract the admiration of men, for "the beauty of the king's daughter is within." And for this very reason it will be more permanent, more lasting. A traveler tells of visiting in Liverpool. He admired especially the many beautiful chapels and churches, erected in that city by the pennies of the poor. He stood before one edifice and exclaimed: "This is the most beautiful temple I have ever had the good fortune to gaze upon!"

"No, it isn't," replied a priest, "come with me and I shall show you a greater."

He followed the pastor until he came to a poor but neat little home in the vicinity. The priest introduced the stranger to an old lady of a cheerful, kindly disposition. They spoke with her for a short time, and then took their leave. When they were in the street again the priest continued: "You have seen in that poor woman a greater temple than the Cathedral close by. Moreover, the stones in that edifice will finally decay, crumble, but the glory of that woman's soul will shine forever."

Put your hand, then, to the plow with a will determined to overcome all obstacles. Turn neither to the right nor to the left. Cultivate your field, harrow it, seed it. Never look behind. And in the autumn of life you will have the satisfaction of reaping a noble, strong character —in the autumn of life the harvest will ripen and be gathered finally into the everlasting granaries of heaven!

V

A SUFFERING FRIEND

It is a truism that it is comparatively easy to speak of trivial affairs but next to impossible to describe those things which touch the soul with love or sear the heart in anguish.

I find myself in just such a predicament in trying to narrate my reactions to the sufferings of my Friend. Such things are beyond speech. Words in this case are apt to be but words and nothing more—they do not reveal at all the feelings of the heart. Let me, therefore, endeavor to solve the difficulty by making use of two homely parables. The first is to bring out in general the merits of suffering. Such a parable with its consequent reflections might run as follows:

Once upon a time a little boy was lost in the woods. Night came down suddenly upon him. He feared the darkness, and at first he was so horrified, so appalled that his eyes refused to function. Gradually, however, he became accustomed to his surroundings. The kindly trees whispered soothingly to him; the fresh, pungent

air invigorated him, and a bright, silver moon came up out of the east to cheer him, and reveal also a cabin in the clearing. He entered the shack, prepared a little shake-down in the corner. He then knelt for a moment to remind himself that God was present in darkness as well as in light, and then—then he went to sleep. He slumbered soundly until morning. The birds greeted him on awakening, and with the day he recognized his position, and was eventually able to reach home in safety.

It is the same with suffering. We resent its coming; we chafe under the cross so recently placed on our shoulders. But then, almost unconsciously, we shape the shoulders to the burden, and gradually (oh, so gradually!) come to perceive the benefits where before we saw only darkness and utter misery. We freely and gladly trust our lives to a chance acquaintance who drives a car, to an unknown pilot, perhaps, in an airplane, but we are hesitant when it comes to Providence guiding our destiny, especially when the road becomes rough and lights grow dim. "Why are ye fearful? O ye of little faith!"

The wisest wisdom in the world is the wisdom that comes from suffering. And still, though

theoretically we may convince ourselves of the truth of this discovery from hard, torturous experience, it appears next to impossible practically to impress this idea upon our souls. "Singin' in the Rain" may be a popular song, yet the greater number of mankind prefer to exercise their vocal ability in a well-furnished, warm, sunshiny room rather than alone on a bleak, rainy street.

The most potent example of the benefits of suffering came to my notice some fifteen years ago, when I was stationed in a little prairie town in Montana. It was before prohibition came into effect. There was a saloon on every corner and dives were tolerated in certain sections of the city. Into this wild, frontier life came a young Catholic lad who had just been graduated from an eastern law school. He was a handsome fellow, clear-cut, clear-eyed, aggressive. Aided by a certain influential citizen, he soon became a dominant figure in the politics of the town. He did not drink, he did not smoke. A Sir Galahad, in fact, in the midst of roués. From the side lines I watched the fight this boy was making, and wondered just how long he could stand the bombardment which came to him in the form of

blandishments, seductions, enticements. No pugilist could have stood up under the beating he was receiving. Then, suddenly, he contracted spinal meningitis. For two years or more he was bedridden, in point of fact scarcely able to move. Then came a change for the better. He was able gradually to exercise the joints of his body a little and finally, through perserverance and indomitable will power, succeeded in sitting up and walking. At present, the only exterior reminder of his serious illness is a defective leg. He overcomes this affliction by using a cane, which he carries as an ex-service man does an empty sleeve, proudly, gayly. The people still idolize him, but he takes their adulation unconcernedly, for what it is actually worth—nothing. He is married, the proud father of happy children, and best of all—*laus Deo!*—an exemplary Catholic. He came in to see me the other day, cane and all. Our positions were reversed. This time I was the patient; he, the visitor. He told me of his work, his hopes, his ambitions. After he had departed, it seemed to me that I understood a little more clearly the truth: "Whom the Lord loveth He chastiseth!"

However, though we from time to time catch

faint adumbrations of the advantages of suffering, nevertheless we seldom arrive at anything like an adequate realization of the treasures contained in crosses. The truth of this assertion lies in the obvious fact that, while we daily solace the sick by a few trite phrases anent the benefits of afflictions, we ourselves seldom, if ever, desire to suffer. Even mature Religious find it next to impossible to remain on a bed of pain, or even—(without pain)—to be obliged to remain inactive on account of physical disabilities. They are forever repining about the work they should be performing, the duties they should be fulfilling. And still these same people can quite glibly admonish the sick that "they have chosen the better part," that to sit quietly at the feet of Christ is better than to perform the most extraordinary works. Manifestly they have no deep, sincere appreciation of the fruits of trials and afflictions. A man will gladly undergo physical pain for the sake of health. He will submit to operations, or quite unconcernedly approach the dentist and have a tooth extracted for the betterment of his general condition. And yet that same man will resist suffering even though

it be essential for the health of the soul. You cannot sharpen a tool unless it be pressed against the grindstone, you cannot sketch unless the charcoal be burned, and so, too, you cannot polish and purify the soul without tribulations and adversities. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself daily, take up his cross, and follow Me." If we desire the end—the salvation of our immortal souls—we must of necessity desire the means—crosses, persecutions.

A young man of my acquaintance who had been obliged for years to spend considerable time in hospitals and sanatoriums, and who, because of irregularities of the stomach, could not digest the most delicately prepared food, determined as a last resort to endure the hardships and inconveniences of life on a large cattle ranch in an effort to regain his health. The agony he endured for the first few weeks is scarcely believable. His hands became woefully blistered. His legs refused to carry him. He suffered from lassitude, discouragement, and (worst of all!) the mockery of his companions. Finally he triumphed. After six months he was well on the road to recovery. He thrived on hardtack and

coffee, where before the most savory of dishes did not tempt him. Fresh air and the great open spaces had won the day.

Similar examples of how hardships and suffering metamorphosed our boys during the War are known to many. One lad in particular who was always rather particular about having rubbers, umbrella, and raincoat whenever he ventured forth in damp weather, wrote home to his fond parents a rather minute description of life in the trenches on a rainy night, and concluded by informing them that he now could sleep in the rain, without rubbers, umbrella, or raincoat, much more comfortably than in downy beds indoors. The seasoning of deprivations and hardships had sweetened everything.

There is an Indian legend that tells of a young brave badly wounded in battle. He questioned an old seer of the tribe as to whether he would recover. The seer replied: "You shall enjoy perfect health just as soon as you go into the woods and slay a mountain lion." The ruse succeeded. The Indian lad forgot his lassitude and the pain of his wounds in the great desire that possessed him to slay the lion. He was off at the first opportunity to fulfill the quest. After months in

the open (while strength and vigor flowed anew through his veins) his wish was realized. He, at last, came to the habitat of the mountain lion. He slew one, and returned to his village in perfect health.

Though the above is only a legend, it brings out the truth that physical perfection is seldom acquired without a certain amount of hardships and pain. And just as health of body presupposes endurance, willingness to suffer, so also there can be no vigor of soul without physical and mental crosses. Men worthy of the name "man" must needs be proved before they receive their sword and buckler. "Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation. Humble thy heart, and endure; incline thy ear, and receive the words of understanding; and make not haste in the time of clouds. Wait on God with patience; join thyself to God, and endure that thy life may be increased in the latter end. Take all that shall be brought upon thee; and in thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation keep patience. For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation." Could anything be more

beautifully, more poetically said in praise of suffering than the above? I scarcely think so. And yet more potent, more winsome, more alluring than the written word ever will be is a concrete example of the glories of suffering, and this we have in the life and passion of Christ.

The personality of our Blessed Savior would not appeal to us with the great force it does were it not for His sufferings and humiliations. There is something in the brave endurance of sorrow that tugs at our heart strings as nothing else does. We cannot resist it. It overpowers us. Call it sympathy, call it pity, call it what you will—it grips us nevertheless. And when we add to the cruel indignities heaped upon Christ, the motive that urged Him on to endure them (I mean His desire to save us all from perdition)—when we recall this phase of His passion, our sympathy, our pity should change to an all-devouring friendship and love. The Book says that there is a thing which many waters cannot quench. It was that thing that gave to the God-man on that memorable day almost two thousand years ago, courage and strength to conquer human nature and to lay down His life for the salvation of souls. Men seldom, if ever, use that

name. To them it sounds effeminate, sentimental, maudlin. Tell a man that you love him and likely as not he will knock you down as a silly romancer. He calls it by another title, loyalty to a comrade, friendship, but the Book—let us always remember—calls it love. In fact, the Book says it is the highest form, the summit of love. "Greater love than this no man hath that a man lay down his life for his friends." You cannot do more for a comrade than give him the most precious possession you have, (which is life). This Christ freely gave, and thereby should win the undying gratitude and love of mankind.

And now we come to the second parable—a parable with its attendant reflections not addressed to mankind in general, but to the individual soul in particular. Such a story might run like this:

The lunger was irritated, and, viewing things from a natural standpoint, perhaps he had reason for this state of mind. It was well past one o'clock in the morning and still he was unable to sleep—the fever prevented him, and so he tossed and tossed; the more he tossed the more unjust did his condition in life appear. For three years he had remained patiently in bed at

the sanatorium in hopes of being able to accomplish some good in the world; now, though he took all precautions, watched his diet, and slept out on the porch every night—now the lackadaisical feeling and the slow-burning fever were returning. It was no use. He would give up fighting. Suddenly a blood-curdling yell smote upon the night air. The lunger looked out through the lattice. Two inebriates came reeling up the street. One narrowly escaped being run over by a passing autoist. The noise they made, the language they used, the distorted antics in which they indulged were disgusting in the extreme.

The lunger then gazed across the street where an automobile was parked. A boy and a girl were there. Here were two more lambs straying from the fold. The lunger looked again at his watch to assure himself that it was two o'clock. And then—then—like a hammer against an anvil the truth smote him. Why—why with health and strength he might be like those misguided beings in the street. Now, at least, he was incapable of offending his Maker. Then the lunger did a strange thing—he crept out of bed, went down on his knees and (because he was young) sobbed until one might think his heart

would break. After a time the sobs ceased and the lunger crept again into bed. He saw it all now. The Master (he said to himself) might have used as an emblem the fair olive tree or the cedar of Lebanon. But He did not. He compared Himself to the vine. "I am the vine and ye are the branches." And then the lunger meditated upon the life of the vine.

The vine has no life of ease. It has no flowering time. It grows not like the wild trailing arbutus whither it wills. No! from the first days it grows not free to heaven but tied to a stake. And, if its arms stretch out, it is but crosswise. The more it grows, the straighter bound are all its branches until the vintage comes. After the grapes are gathered into the wine press, one would think the vine might be allowed to rejoice a little in the good work accomplished. But not so. Despoiled, disfigured, left to the mercy of a cruel wind, it is forgotten. All through the wintertime the wine gives joy to those who else were dismal in the cold, but the poor vine stands out amid the frost and has only this grace left—that it endures the winter through in long, lone steadfastness, and next year blooms again.

Once more sobs shook the bed of the invalid.

He saw the treasure he possessed in suffering. Light eternal smote him as it did Saul of Tarsus centuries before. Why had he been so selfish, so ungrateful, so churlish with the Lord? How brave, how courageous Christ, the Vine, had been! That Blood of His still warmed the hearts of men, but the Vine—Calvary—was forgotten. No one now wished to suffer. It was too much to ask a pleasure-loving world! A great resolution welled up in the heart of the lunger. Almost instinctively he began to repeat:

"Measure thy life by loss instead of gain,
Not by the wine drunk but the wine poured forth,
For love's strength lieth in love's sacrifice,
And whoso suffers most has most to give."

I think we might fruitfully imitate the poor invalid. Christ erased the writing on the wall against us; He paid our debt. We should be honest enough to repay Him. But how? Not necessarily in any highly dramatic, spectacular manner—by one large check as it were. No! Debts usually are paid little by little. So, too, our obligations to Christ. They can easily be paid by enduring suffering for Him in the little

daily events we encounter in our lives. We seldom have to seek them; they seek us.

I was conversing with three Religious some time ago. Within a few minutes after our meeting I learned that two of them were tired—woefully tired. The third, who had every reason to be fatigued, for he was a consistently hard worker, when asked his condition of health, replied. "Fine! Thanks be to God!" This Religious was accepting the everyday happenings of life after the example of the Master. He was acquiring the art of Midas—learning to change the drab things of life into pure gold. It is well for us to recall that a habit of valiantly meeting and conquering the little vicissitudes of existence spells success in religious life. Such souls are invariably happy and cheerful, and, as a natural consequence, spread an aura of sunshine about them. Then, too, because of their gladsome bouyancy and courage, they often are selected to "go up higher," to become intimates of the King. A soldier who gives daily evidence of fortitude and valor is more apt to be promoted than another who does not possess such qualities.

On the other hand, the life of a weakling in religion is pathetic in the extreme. He is not

satisfied with himself; he is at war with himself. And so, in an effort to salve conscience, he begins to feed himself large quantities of self-pity, to excuse himself. The results are disastrous. These Religious become more and more selfish, morose, unhappy. They effect little, if any, good for the neighbor. They barely succeed in saving their own souls. And all because they have not the stamina to follow the Savior. "If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself daily, take up his cross, and follow Me."

The most satisfying aspect of suffering *for* Christ, in imitation *of* Christ, is that we are suffering *with* Christ. And this not only for the achieving of our individual salvation, but for the redemption of sinners as well. It is but a step—and a small one at that—between suffering courageously for our own welfare and that nobler, more altruistic motive of enduring suffering in order to make up for the deficiencies of others. This status of being a "victim" with Christ should appeal in a peculiar way to cloistered souls. Looking out from their monastic walls in these our days, they see a great majority of the children of Adam rushing heedlessly to their eternal destruction. Can nothing be done

to stem the appalling flood of sin? Yes, indeed! Truly religious souls can apply a remedy. They can by patiently enduring and sanctifying their physical and mental trials, by uniting them with the sufferings of Christ, restore the equilibrium where before the scales were weighted down by the preponderance of sin. They can, in other words, in a wonderfully noble and beautiful way, assist their Brother, Christ, in the work of redeeming the human race—a work so very dear to, and consonant with the desires and aspirations of, the Sacred Heart of the Savior.

This, then is the *El Camino Real*—"The Royal Road"—hallowed by the footsteps of the Master, upon which the favored few are asked to tread. Only the valiant of heart may answer this call to arms—only those may walk therein who, like the Redeemer, having joy set before them prefer the Cross, despising its shame. But look! gentle reader, though this road be hard to tired feet, and long and dusty, it leads, nevertheless, to a wondrous City exceedingly beautiful. Cheered by the companionship of the gentle Christ, and with our eyes turned toward the distant lights of that far-off City, we travel along with courage and confidence, knowing that,

"The shadowed hill of Calvary
On every life looks down,
And we go up with Him to win
The Cross and then—the Crown."

VI

A PRAYERFUL FRIEND

To a casual observer the most distressing characteristic of an ordinary Catholic is his marked indifference to the treasures he possesses in the Faith. This noticeable lack of appreciation is not confined to a small minority. Not at all! It has so permeated the vast majority, that nowadays we take this phenomenon for granted. The average Catholic is lukewarm. A fervent one is the exception. The average soul hears Mass on Sundays, goes occasionally to confession, assists in a minimum degree in the support of Church, and after a manner, is just. But the point is he does not hunger and thirst after justice. He is not an enthusiast. He is not seeking *first* the Kingdom of God and its justice. The material affairs of life, his business interests hold his main attention. The interests of God are secondary, like a new suit, as it were, which is worn for one day a week, and kept in a dark closet the rest of the time.

Not until the individual becomes thoroughly

awake to the beauties, the glories of the Catholic Church, not until he perceives that She alone holds the key to the many difficult problems confronting the masses today, not until then may we expect a persevering, systematic effort to popularize our Faith and render it acceptable to the millions of inquiring souls outside her pale. It is strange—exceedingly strange—how we fear and mistrust that about which we know little or nothing. And suspicion in those outside the Church is an indirect indictment of us ourselves. We are not living our lives and selling the doctrines of our Faith to others as we should, otherwise the story would be different.

The question of prayer is an example in point. Praying is not at all popular. One reason is, as we stated above, that we Catholics are not fully aware of the dire need of communing with God where there is question of our own soul's welfare, and, as a consequence, we are not much concerned about interesting others on this subject, or persuading them to try it out on the problems facing them in the business world. So the result is that while we pray a little on Sundays, we seldom think of the Maker during the other days of the week, unless it be for a short time at

morning and night. Consequently, it is not too hard a saying to aver that prayer is not very popular these days either in or out of the Church.

There is a great deal of cause for cynical remarks on the efforts that advertising companies, members of Rotary and other allied organizations put forth to build up confidence and prosperity in the community where they exist and, at the same time, lose sight of Him Who can prosper these endeavors or quickly bring them to naught. One should fancy that for utilitarian reasons alone they would see the dire need of prayer. They might with great benefit to themselves adopt a slogan something like this: "The more frequently a man falls down on his knees, the less frequently he will fall down on his job." This, of course, is a desideratum not to be expected in our own day, but it can and should be gradually brought about by the example of Catholics who are not alone theoretically convinced of the value of prayer, but who live out in their daily lives that admonition of the Savior that we ought always to pray and not to faint.

I venture to say that the principal reason why most of us seldom acquire a relish for prayer

comes from the fact that we do not make a distinction between saying our prayers and praying. The person who is content with merely saying his prayers very seldom becomes a prayerful man. He remains stationary. He is just as much in a rut as a convict on a tread mill or a squirrel running around in a cage.

Some months ago I made the acquaintance of an elevator boy in a large metropolitan office building. He informed me that he ran his elevator over twenty-five miles daily, and that up to the time of my conversation with him, he had covered 80,000 miles. But he never had arrived anywhere. There are many well-meaning people who never arrive, because they have no predetermined objective. Supposing that young elevator pilot were to stretch out his 80,000 miles, he could see a considerable portion of this globe; he could ramble about the kraals of Rhodesia, and enjoy a trip in a sampan in China; he could view the midnight sun in Alaska or greet the dawn in New Hampshire. Without plan or purpose we seldom reach our destination. We become rudderless drifters and, like derelicts, we are a prey to every wind that blows.

To pray, then, signifies that we have a definite

objective, that we sincerely wish to converse with our Maker, that we are aware of our own littleness and of God's greatness, of our need, and of His bounty. It means, in brief, that we understand the words—"creature" and "Creator."

How, then, should we conduct ourselves in these interviews? The gentle Christ is our Instructor on this point as on all others. He admonishes us in the first place not to use many words. "And when you are praying, speak not much, as the heathens. For they think that in their much speaking they may be heard." Words, for the most part, are superfluous. They oftentimes clog and distract the soul. Where there is perfect understanding, where heart speaks to heart, there is seldom need of words. I have frequently seen an old Indian spend three and four hours visiting a sick member of his tribe, and scarcely a word passed between them during that period. The old Redman's manner of showing sympathy was full of common sense. He did not tire out the patient by talking too much, and still the sick one was perfectly conscious of the other's good will and friendly interest. Our Blessed Lord endeavors to inculcate this same

important lesson in that strikingly vivid parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. The Pharisee spends his interview with God in talking—*talking* of everything except his soul's interest, speaking of the things that do not count, neglecting the *unum necessarium.* The Publican, on the other hand, wastes no time in preliminaries. He strips himself of all useless wrappings. He gets down to the very essence of things—his soul and the Creator. Nothing else matters. And when he does give utterance to a few words, it is as if he did not open his lips, the words are almost unconsciously spoken, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner." The heart is the speaker, and God the Searcher of hearts, recognizes this.

We, though warned against a plethora of words in praying, will do well, nevertheless, to give some consideration to the words we do use. No matter how few, words may be nothing but certain gyrations of the human voice—they may be "as sounding brass or tinkling cymbals"; but they may also be winged messengers, arrows reaching to the very throne of God. To this latter class belong the ejaculations, terse pleas, cries for aid which we encounter in the Gospels. To begin they are brief and concise, full of meat,

and contain a great deal in a little—*multum in parvo.*

There are two principal reasons why these vocal calls from the heart ought to be popular with those devoted to prayer. The first springs from the fact that these sayings are familiar to the Christ. He heard them on all sides during His sojourn here below. Naturally, then, when we exclaim: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" we arouse poignantly sweet memories in the Heart of the Christ. He recalls His toils, labors, sufferings for the good of mankind. He sees again the winding road, the enthusiastic crowds, and the disconsolate lepers in the distance imploring, beseeching Him to have mercy on them. Frequently He lauded the faith and confidence of those who sought His aid in those far-off times. May we not expect that if we imitate their persistence and faith, He will likewise reward us also?

The second and more important reason why these Gospel colloquies ought to be more popular comes from this that they contain in themselves the rudiments of all prayer. The essence of prayer is to endeavor to understand God and ourselves—to fathom as far as a finite mind may,

both our nothingness and God's omnipotence, our poverty, His wealth. Now it is precisely in keeping this ever before us that they excel. To repeat over and over again, for example, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof. Say but the word and my servant shall be healed," is just another way of accentuating the truth that God is All and we are nothing. This same fact is exquisitely brought out in a sentence of nine words. "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean!" Herein God is acknowledged as all-powerful and we as wretched sinners. And that, let us repeat once more for the sake of emphasis, is the kernel, the heart of prayer. Whenever, then, we address the Almighty, let it always be *de produndis*—from the depths—from the depths of our nothingness up, up, up to the throne of the all-holy, all-merciful God. Our spiritual success depends on learning very thoroughly what the word "creature" means and what the word "Creator" signifies.

After admonishing us to be rather sparing in speech, our Blessed Savior goes on to tell us there is another element in prayer, an element not to be overlooked—perseverance. Lack of perseverance often connotes lack of confidence

either in God's individual interest in us or in His power to assist us. Now, if we reflect for but half a moment, we can assure ourselves on these points. God cares for me personally. He has numbered not alone all the sparrows but the leaves of the trees and the hairs of our head. If He does this with inanimate objects, how much more so will He watch and foster us who are endowed with an immortal soul.

Neither should we doubt His power. The one who assembles a locomotive can readily dismantle it. The God Who made this marvelous mechanism which we call the world and everything in it, can, with equal facility, hold parts of it in abeyance whenever and wherever He wills. He has done so in the past as we learn from authentic sources. It is not at all improbable that He will do likewise in the future.

With the Providence and Power of God taken, then, for granted, any lack of perseverance must necessarily emanate from our volatile wills. Our minds flit from one idea to another as a grasshopper jumps from one direction to another. We are inconstant not alone in material, but in spiritual matters as well. We sometimes pray for a certain favor, and within a month we are

petitioning heaven for the opposite. It is not unnatural, then, that many of our prayers are denied. Our Lord foresaw just such conditions, and in order to stabilize the will He promises infallibly to hear our prayers if—if we persevere. "And He spoke also a parable to them, that we ought to pray, and not to faint, saying: 'There was a judge in a certain city, who feared not God, nor regarded men. And there was a certain widow in that city, and she came to him, saying. 'Avenge me of my adversary.' And he would not for a long time. But afterwards he said within himself: 'Although I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow is troublesome to me, I will avenge her, lest continually coming she weary me.'" And lest this be not sufficient, we read again in the same St. Luke: . . . "And He said to them: 'Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and shall say to him: Friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend of mine is come off his journey to me, and I have not what to set before him. And he from within should answer, and say: Trouble me not, the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. Yet if he shall continue knocking, I say to you,

although he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend; yet because of his importunity, he will rise, and give him as many as he needeth. And I say to you, ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. And which of you, if he ask his father bread, will he give him a stone? or a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he reach him a scorpion? If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask him?'"

Besides these beautiful words of Christ on prayer and perseverance, we have also His encouraging example. From the first moment in the crib, when He lifted His tiny arms in supplication to the Father, until His last whispered prayer on the Cross, He shows us by His every action the necessity and importance of prayer. When the day is filled with toil and labor for the neighbor, He takes from the night to speak to His Father. And oftentimes, as the Evangelist tells us, the entire night was spent in this man-

ner. And thus before His public life, before His selection of the Apostles, before the Passion—in all the great crises of His career, He goes away to the lonely mountain, to the desert place, that He may converse with the Father. When poor human nature rebels against the coming torments, He prays and prays. "And being in agony, He prayed the longer." So earnestly, so joyfully did He perform the duty of prayer, that those about Him quickly became interested, enthusiastic too. "And it came to pass, that as He was in a certain place praying, when He ceased, one of His disciples said to Him: 'Lord, teach us to pray. . . .' "

With this great example of the Christ before us, how can we think otherwise of prayer? Why do we hesitate to raise our hearts to so good a Master when He has so often and so pleadingly told us to do so? It has been said so beautifully that prayer is the golden key that unlocks the granaries of heaven. If, then, we have any request (and who of us have none?) let us heed the loving invitation of the gentle Christ and retire within our holy of holies and there He will speak to our hearts.

Following the example of Christ we can with

persistent effort and perseverance also become men of prayer. We can, moreover, draw others to appreciate and to desire the gift of prayer. We can—yes, strange as it may seem—we can, if only we will, make prayer a popular, manly act. Through it we can erect a tower that will reach to the skies—to the very throne of God. Yea, more! we can coerce the very Hands of the Almighty, and render Him pliant and docile to our requests.

"And when it was day, Judas showed himself in the plain with three thousand men only, who neither had armour nor swords: And they saw the camp of the Gentiles that it was strong, and the men in breast-plates, and the horsemen round about them and these were trained up to war. And Judas said to the men that were with him: fear ye not their multitude, neither be ye afraid of their assault. Remember in what manner our fathers were saved in the Red Sea, when Pharaoh pursued them with a great army. And now let us cry to heaven, and the Lord will have mercy on us, and will remember the covenant of our fathers, and will destroy this army before our face this day: And all nations shall know that there is One that redeemeth and delivereth

Israel. And the strangers lifted up their eyes, and saw them coming against them. And they went out of the camp to battle, and they that were with Judas sounded the trumpet. And they joined battle: and the Gentiles were routed, and fled into the plain."

There you have one example out of many where a human being swung defeat into victory by calling the Almighty to his aid. Like old Archimedes, we can forge the lever of prayer so as to shake the very foundations of this world.

VII

A LONELY FRIEND

It is a rather sad commentary on the times that, though we have singled out and exalted above all others the Unknown Soldier—the man who was willing to obliterate himself and *die* for his country—the man who is willing to forget self and *live* for his country is seldom praised in the Councils of the Nations. We exist in such a maelstrom of activities, we pass our days in such hectic endeavors, that a quiet, peaceful, routine life is (to us) no life at all. We can hardly conceive of progress without glaring headlines and sound of trumpet. There must be, we fancy, a cackle for every *egg* of achievement that is produced. We watch with curiosity the different machines at work in excavating for a new skyscraper. The noise and din fascinate us, hypnotize us. But we never stop to consider the silent, steady growth of an apple from the blossom to the ripened fruit, though it might be argued that an apple is just as necessary to our welfare as an egg. The roar of Niagara is doing less for this country than the quiet meanderings of innumer-

able streams, each irrigating the section assigned it without noise or boasting. But " 'Tis true 'tis pity! and pity 'tis 'tis true" that the name Niagara is on the lips of all, whereas scarcely anyone averts to the benefits bestowed upon mankind by the unknown streams.

There is a band of men in the northwest coast country of whose existence we seldom are made aware, and still these men are so necessary to the material prosperity of this section that without them marine commerce would stagnate and decay. They are elderly men who, by long years of unswerving reliability, have convinced employers that they are capable of the responsible task alloted them. They are the pilots who crawl up the ladder out beyond Juan de Fuca Straits and guide the ocean liners to their ports in safety. Their success in life consists in doing the same thing over and over again; no great sudden blare —just to do it again, even more perfectly than the last time. The more silently and unobtrusively they can pass year by year through varying combinations of wind, fog, tide, and rock-ribbed passage, the better for them. The pilot without his name on the front page is the great pilot. For when his name is noised abroad, it

generally spells a wreck. He has then lost the gift of legerdemain; he is a ruined man.

There are many reasons both negative and positive why Christ is not welcomed as He should be in this world He made, but the main negative reason is (as we hinted above) that men of today —especially those outside the Church—do not advert to the work the Savior does in their midst because of the quiet, gentle, unobtrusive nature of that work. It is not bruited about, broadcast on all sides, because this is impossible. You can no more describe the gladness of heart that comes from a well-made confession—the enthusiasm that grips one from a fervent Communion—the spiritual joy that springs from a charitable act toward the poor—any more than you can exactly say of what material the moon is made. It just cannot be done. Only when the children of men seriously reflect on the silent metamorphosis that Christ and Christ's Church make in the hearts of the poor—only then will they begin to admire the Church and perceive the necessity of spreading Christ's Kingdom in the souls of all mankind. They will see then that it is imperative that they themselves become attuned to the teachings of the Master. It is like a veteran

driver. Only after years of driving a car yourself do you recognize the art of passing through traffic and intersections without close shaves, of traveling the main arterial roads at a higher sustained speed—only then do you recognize the art in others. So too, as the years glide on and we approximate just a little closer to the Savior—only then do we reflect on the stupendous work the Christ performs in this world—only then do we glimpse how close He is to the creatures He formed out of nothing. A potter broods, as it were, over his work; the horticulturist lovingly fondles his flowers. Why should not Christ do likewise?

Of course, there are positive reasons, too, why the Christ is lonely in this world of His. And I think the main positive obstacle militating against a more general acceptance of the Master's teachings may be easily discovered in one of the principal tenets of the everyday philosophy we meet in the business world of today. I refer in particular to that idol we have erected in our midst and at whose feet the vast majority prostrate themselves—the great dragon, work. There is a sentence in the writings of Jeremias where the prophet speaks of the Israelites as

having committed two evils. "They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." There you have a vivid delineation in a few words of the afflictions preying upon Society today. Men have left God and have dug cisterns—philosophies of their own that are broken, that cannot satisfy them, that are false. Such a one is the shibboleth about the glories of work, of service. This trend toward limiting everything to the practical is much more pronounced than we at first sight should fancy. It is obvious in the intellectual world where our youth seek the advantages of a degree, not for the enjoyment of study which such a reward postulates, but to further their plans of material advancement. As a consequence, then, more stress is laid upon the hours spent on a subject than upon the amount of knowledge garnered and stored in the mind on that subject.

In the moral realm we notice it also. Work is viewed as an end in itself, not as a means any longer. It is a panacea, a religion, excluding the supernatural in any shape or form. Civic clubs have so accentuated this notion of service, of

work for others, that to labor is now considered by the ordinary business man as the *summum bonum* and his heaven is built here below from the money he obtains from his toil. Nor are we overstating facts. In the modern world Christ and Christ's Church are ignored. The idol, work, and the resultant of work, wealth—these are the favorites of the hour. They have indeed dug for themselves broken cisterns that will not hold water. In this general debacle, in this false philosophy which flourishes about us, let Catholics take heed lest they be contaminated. So many times we hear even in religion about superiors who have the ability to obtain money, to build orphanages, colleges, asylums. All very well! But it must be borne in mind that while the Catholic Church is always in the vanguard where there is a question of caring for the infirm, the aged, the leper, the orphan, She (the Church) has a far higher mission than merely doing temporary relief work—her primal goal is to put the stamp of eternal relief in the souls of men and prepare them for the enjoyment of a world without end.

There is a dear old Monsignor in London, formerly an Anglican curate, who was received

into the Church by Cardinal Newman. When about to celebrate the golden jubilee of his ordination, he wrote to his friends asking them not to contribute to a jubilee fund but to give him their prayers and an intention in their Masses on his jubilee day. Such an example is as refreshing as a sudden ray of sunshine on a gloomy day. It shows us that real followers of Christ are more intent on getting closer to Him, more eager to console their lonely Friend, than they are to amass the perishable goods of earth. This example, too, coming from the individual (the correct starting point of all true reform) should point the way wherein others are to walk. For the Church of the Ages in following the doctrines of St. Thomas, of Suarez, of Bellarmine, and others anent the dignity of the individual, is, after all is said and done, only walking in the footsteps of the Master. He thought the individual of paramount importance. He spoke directly to the individual . . . "If thou wilt be perfect, sell what thou hast and give it to the poor and come follow Me. . . . If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself daily, take up his cross, and follow Me. . . . And what shall

a man give in exchange for his soul?" The individual, always the individual. The most important personage in the universe.

Deeply persuaded, then, of the immense love Christ bore the individual, and of the miracles of annihilation He performed in order to meet the individual as it were on a par, Man to man, of the way He exalted man by speaking separately to him, recalling these truths, should not our hearts glow with a devastating fire to do our part individually in making Him better known, less lonely in the world which He created? This task, of course, means quiet, unobtrusive plodding at our own sanctification. It presupposes the elimination of sins and imperfections which retard our friendship with Him. Here, as in most other circumstances, the old Latin adage is true: "An equal associates very easily with equals." In other words, when we consistently endeavor to model our lives on the pattern He has set us, when we try to draw closer and closer to Him, it is but reasonable to expect that He will come more than halfway to meet our aspirations and desires.

Nor ought the difficulties of the task we set for ourselves affrighten or dishearten us. Close

imitation of Christ is irksome at times it is true, but the way is not half so rough as some would lead us to imagine. What we see depends a great deal on what we wish to see. If we expect trouble, we may rest assured it will be there. Such an attitude of mind is, however, just another indication of lack of perseverance. "The slothful man saith: 'There is a lion in the way.' " And his fears and apprehensions are many times greater than the actual condition of facts warrants. Generally speaking, the lion is not nearly so ferocious as is imagined. He is one of those anemic, decrepit Hollywood lions sans claws and sans teeth, which is placed in the road not only to dishearten the timid, but to tempt the strong. There is no defeat except that discouragement which comes from our own inherent weakness of purpose. "To believe in the heroic," as Disraeli once remarked, "makes heroes." If we sincerely desire intimacy with Christ, we can obtain it; even more, for through diligence and thoughtfulness we may become favorites of His.

There are two elderly men on our street who live three or four doors apart. But the houses in between are no obstacles, for they are constantly together. One helps the other with his

garden; then he, in turn, reciprocates. Even after the day's work is over and their pipes are lighted and they seek their front verandas—even then these two cronies have not had enough of each other's company. One will walk over and sit by his comrade. And oftentimes far into the night one perceives the glow of the pipes and hears the quiet cadence of their voices. Two old friends they are, tried and true. "A faithful friend is a strong defense: and he that hath found him has found a treasure. Nothing can be compared to a faithful friend, and no weight of gold or silver is able to countervail the goodness of his fidelity. A faithful friend is the medicine of life and immortality."

The friendship of Christ, too, becomes more refreshing, more desirable, more wonderful as the years glide by. We may be out on the road as the evening shadows gather, and our hearts may be sadly troubled and perturbed, but providentially we meet a Traveler Who lightens our burdens and inflames our hearts and we know Him in the "breaking of the bread." These signs of favor, these shady spots in the desert places, are bestowed on us not so much as rewards as stimuli to further effort. The disciples, going to

Emmaus, returned fearlessly to Jerusalem after their visit with Christ. Their doubts, worries, apprehensions were now passed; they were ready to meet any eventuality—Christ was with them. It is always well for us to bear in mind that while striving to go *to* Christ we are engaged in a work so pleasing to His divine Heart that in going *to* Him we are in reality going *with* Him. He becomes a Traveler like us—a Viator to aid us on the road, and He supplies Viaticum, the traveler's Food, lest we faint from hunger. Besides this, He meets us at the journey's end—He throws aside His disguise and welcomes us to the Father's Home where we are to abide forever. Then, too, we shall recognize Him in the "breaking of the bread"; then, too, we shall forget the dust and the heat of the road—these will be no longer remembered in the radiant smile of the Master's countenance.

With such a Friend, then, as Companion, with such a Friend to greet us and bid us welcome at the end of the road, why should we hesitate to throw in our lot whole-heartedly with Christ? Such an existence is by no means a drab one. The saints did not find it so. Because they were disgusted with this world and its manifold

vanities does not connote that they were unhappy. But it does prove that they were interested in something else which claimed their entire attention. Until we discover just what that "something else" is, it might be rather good policy to withhold our pity from the saints. It is just possible that it is all going to waste. You do not pity the man or woman who uses sane, practical methods in dealing with the problems of another world more truly existent than this fluctuating one of ours! You need not pity the individual who takes the Gospel story literally; such a man deserves rather our admiration and perhaps, envy (if we have not courage enough to follow in his footsteps), but never our pity. One feels pity for cowards, not for heroes. And most people agree that the saints were heroes, though a vast majority fancy them as misdirected heroes.

At all events, it is no more correct to consider the saints as unhappy beings, than to judge that Nuns are forced against their wills to remain in convents. We have left this milestone of intolerance behind, even though it has not been mentioned as yet in the advertisements of a well-known cigaret company. Certainly there is no

evidence to show that St. Anthony of Padua was unhappy with his beloved Bambino. Nor does the innocent, heavenly countenance of St. Stanislaus suggest sadness or gloom. Quite the contrary. These souls were so thoroughly enraptured at being admitted to intimacy with Christ that they could not be anything else but happy. This is the obvious explanation, but, of course, it does not appeal to a suspicious generation. We are so dreadfully afraid of being deceived!

Not so long ago a man in New York wagered a friend twenty dollars to one that he could accost thirty men on the street, offer them a genuine fifty-dollar bill in exchange for a five-dollar bill, and that they would all refuse the gift. This man, then, not only approached thirty passers-by, but he furthermore informed each one of the fact that he had made the wager in question. Out of the thirty stopped on the street, twenty-nine smiled indulgently, firmly convinced it was a fraud and quickly passed on. The last called a policeman to have the man arrested, but, of course, the fifty-dollar bill was genuine and no action could be taken. Thirty men had been easily deceived by unwarranted suspicions.

It is so with us in our attitude toward Christ. We are afraid, suspicious that if we try to prosper His Kingdom, endeavor to console His lonely Heart, that somehow or other we shall lose by it. We rely on the word of creatures and yet refuse to give credence to the Creator of those creatures. Quite a paradox!

Christ once said that heaven and earth should pass away but His word should not pass away. And the word is this: "He that loveth cleanness of heart, for the grace of his lips shall have the king for his friend. . . . And the Lord will give thee rest continually, and will fill thy soul with brightness, and deliver thy bones, and thou shalt be like a watered garden and like a fountain of water whose waters shall not fail."

VIII

AN UNDERSTANDING FRIEND

Some years ago a pilot was unfortunate enough to ground his ship in Puget Sound. An investigating committee spent week after week in an effort to place the blame for the accident. Finally they decided that the pilot took the less advantageous of two courses. The decision, in effect, spelt *finis* to the poor captain. His work was finished. The innumerable times he had successfully brought ships into port were forgotten. His one mistake was remembered. Called before the Board and told of its findings, he was asked if he had anything to answer in return. "Merely this, gentlemen," he said, "it has taken you three months to conclude that I chose wrongly. I had to decide in less than two minutes."

Whenever I reflect on the Court Scene each one of us must face at the end of life, I must acknowledge that I cast away all unnecessary fear, for I recall that He Who is to be my Judge is an understanding Friend. He knows all the circumstances both palliating and incriminating,

and this prophecy "of searching Jerusalem with a lamp" while blanching the cheek of the wicked should, after all, be doubly reassuring to the just, since such a sentence is only a vindication of their existence here below—a crowning of their endeavors.

When the Lord appeared to Solomon and promised to give him whatsoever he asked, the king replied in this manner: "I am but a child and know not how to go out and come in. And Thy servant is in the midst of the people which Thou hast chosen, an immense people which cannot be numbered or counted for multitude. Give, therefore, to Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people and discern between good and evil."

So acceptable was this prayer of Solomon's to God that the Almighty not only bestowed the favor upon him but the thing for which he might legitimately have asked was granted along with this gift. He received besides, riches, a long life, victory over his enemies, success. God, as it were, outdid Himself in generosity simply because Solomon's desire for understanding was so pleasing to Him. And we might rightfully add, it was pleasing to God, because it is so necessary

toward peace and prosperity in this life of ours. A star, we are told, guided the Wise Men to the crib of Christ—to the Fount of Eternal Truth. Men without understanding fail to reach Eternal Truth, for they cannot glimpse a star to pilot them to the Savior's manger. They allow the fogs and the clouds of prejudice and hate to cut off their vision of heaven, and thus they never arrive at Bethlehem, for understanding of heart is a rare gift and enjoyed only by a few favored souls.

Some two years ago the late Marshal Foch, when interviewed as to his ideas on true greatness, replied something in this manner: "The greatest achievement in life is not to lead others, to command armies. No! the acme of all greatness is to understand others and to be able to have them understand you." Not an easy task, forsooth, but one nevertheless so rich in spoils for the victor that a valiant soul will endeavor to acquire this treasure at all costs.

Understanding of heart presupposes both humility and unselfishness. Humility is necessary in this that no one can successfully treat with another, whom he fancies to be on a lower plane than himself. A superiority complex precludes

real confidences; while humility breaks down barriers, sweeps aside obstacles, and reaches to the very soul itself. "Who is greater, he who serves or he who is served? Behold I have been in the midst of you as One Who serves." It was this lowly condescension which made the saints not alone acceptable to God, but beloved of men as well. St. Francis of Assisi and his Fratelli by their unassuming demeanor and simplicity of soul won the hearts of the poor and the outcast as no other manner of approach could. "They became all in all in order to gain all to Christ."

Understanding of heart likewise presupposes unselfishness as a *conditio sine qua non* of existence. One cannot successfully treat with the neighbor unless he be thoroughly interested in him and at the same time unmindful of his own personal aggrandizement. "If the grain of wheat dieth, it bringeth forth much fruit." Where there is war within the camp, one cannot expect victories from without. When the fires of passion are quenched, when dissension and struggle are quelled within—only then may the soul look for spoils from without. "The patient man is better than the valiant: and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh cities."

This lesson of forgetfulness, of dying to self is so important a one that nature, both animate and inanimate, stresses it frequently.

The giant tree, king of the forest, is incapable of expressing itself; it is dumb. Yet once it is cut down, once it dies, it may be carved and shaped into a marvelous old Stradivarius to delight the ears of mankind. The wild canary seldom becomes an accomplished singer, but once domesticated, once a prisoner behind bars, he carols out his brave little heart to gladden those who hear him.

However, though humility and self-forgetfulness be necessary to understanding of heart, they do not of themselves constitute this virtue, that indefinable winsomeness of heart, that genial kindliness of spirit, which charm the neighbor and render him pliable and submissive in the hands of his friend. It is personality in the highest and best meaning of the word.

We find one of the most charming examples of this virtue in the Gospel of St. Luke. Apropos, I have often seen national heroes like Babe Ruth, idols of the younger generation, single out a lad from an admiring throng and give a glove or a bat to his keeping, much in the same way as a

king would bestow the accolade upon a favorite knight. I have watched with glowing eyes the look of glorious happiness which lit up the boy's countenance as he proudly walked beside his hero and finally disappeared into the distance.

But for sheer loveliness of detail, there is nothing in the annals of dramatic art to compare with the tableau as presented in the nineteenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel.

Recollect that one of the main actors in this scene was a rich man and a cynic. No mere earthly hero could have caught or held his attention. He was too sophisticated, too blasé. Added to this, his reputation was not of the best. He was a publican. But yet he possessed one saving trait, he desired to see Jesus. And, as we mentioned in a former chapter, anyone who sincerely desires an object may possess it. This publican was in earnest. He had heard of the Savior and of His kindness to other publicans, Matthew for instance. This interest of Christ in his kind pricked his curiosity. He wished to obtain a glimpse of this Prophet. So intense was his desire to see Christ that he threw pride to the winds. In a very undignified manner he imitated the boys about him, and climbed up a sycamore

tree. From this place of vantage he can easily see the immense multitude below pushing and jostling to obtain a better view of the procession. He perceives, too, in the distance the procession itself, coming closer and closer. They will soon pass him by and then enter the city of Jericho. He wonders whether he will be fortunate enough to obtain a view of the Face of Christ—that kind, noble countenance about which Matthew had spoken. His heart thrills with a wondrous joy. The Savior draws near; He is just below now glancing about into the faces of the multitude. Then suddenly the Christ stops—actually stops below the tree and looking up with a gentle, pleading smile, He calls: "Zacchæus!" Oh! the happiness of it all! Zacchæus whom everyone snubbed and ignored is now despised no longer. The Master even knows his name. I wonder how He ever found that out! His temples are throbbing with excitement. The crowd is now glancing up at him in the tree. But, hold! the Master continues to address him: "Zacchæus, make haste and come down; for this day I must abide in thy house!" The Christ not only singles him out of this vast multitude, but He flaunts in the faces of the hypocrites about that no matter what they

may think about Zacchæus' being a sinner, He, the Christ, the Wonder Worker, is going to honor this little publican by breaking bread with him—the strongest mark of friendship and affection a Jew may give his neighbor. And thus the crowd instinctively makes way for the little fellow. One or two even aid him down from the tree for the King has spoken. Honor to him whom the King honors! And with his face agleam with heavenly joy he walks bashfully up to the Master. The signal is given and the procession continues on to Jericho. "And when all saw it, they murmured saying that He was gone to be a guest with a man that was a sinner." But little heed did Zacchæus take of them. Their slights and insults no longer had power to hurt, to sting him. Was not the Great Prophet his Friend? He unburdens his heart to the Savior. How happy, how contented he is! There is a rift in the lute—the past. If only he could blot it out entirely! And yet there is a way. It dawns upon him now. If he cannot completely blot out the past, he will do the next best and make reparation for it. Thus will he show in some tangible manner his loyalty and love for Christ. "But Zacchæus standing

said to the Lord: 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wronged any man of anything I restore him fourfold.' Jesus said to him: 'This day is salvation come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.' "

No words, however eloquent, can add to the above. The picture speaks for itself. It clearly demonstrates that an understanding heart may batter down the greatest obstacles. In the life of the Little Flower there is an incident which vividly illustrates this power. In the Convent at Lisieux was a nun who was a continual thorn in the side of the other Sisters. A veritable trouble-maker she was, and quite naturally, few of the Nuns liked her. The Little Flower, though living in peace and concord with all, felt, nevertheless, a certain internal repugnance toward this individual. Promptly she determined to conquer this aversion. She took every opportunity to ingratiate herself with the mischief-maker. No courtesy was overlooked; no service, no matter how menial, was neglected by the saint. Finally the troublesome recluse capitulated. One day she

turned to the Little Flower and said: "Soeur Thérèse, why do you like me so much?" The battle had been won at last.

It is passing strange how inconsistent we human beings are when there is a question of a soul at stake. If we desire the snowbirds to pay us a visit, we leave a few crumbs by the window. We inconvenience ourselves in order to show the pigeons that we mean no harm—that we are their friends. From the window where I write a flock of sea gulls may be seen daily. At the appointed time they congregate about the school, waiting for the children to share their luncheons with them. They instinctively know that here a welcome awaits them. Experience has taught them this. And so they linger about without fear or suspicion in their little hearts. The children have won them. If we older children would act in a similar manner, what a wonderful change would soon occur on this globe of ours. A pleasant "good morning," a kindly nod, a generous deed of charity, a penny in the poor man's hat—there you have the prescription for winning the hearts of men. And once you have captured the heart, the citadel surrenders, the battle is over. Conversions as a general rule are

not wrought by cold, dull reasoning and philosophic argumentation. On the contrary these discussions, unless seasoned and sweetened by kindness, are very apt to engender ill feelings and hatreds.

I have in mind a rather unusual case of a man who some years ago came to a hospital in charge of one of our Sisterhoods. This unfortunate fellow after spending forty years to all intents and purposes as a practical Catholic, suddenly renounced his faith, and to the chagrin and sorrow of his wife and children, commenced a rather bitter campaign against the Church. In the midst of his diabolical slanderings he fell ill of an old chronic disorder and was brought to the Sisters' hospital. Here he remained for nearly three years. During the greater part of this time he was confined to bed, but his physical disability in no way hindered him from arguing with every visitor who came along. Naturally his remarks angered the greater number of his callers and they generally left him in a high state of rancor. The man, they assumed, was either an uncouth, ungentlemanly fellow or else his mind was deranged. Many of the Sisters even remonstrated with the invalid but to no avail. He appeared to

delight in striving to evade their arguments. Then after a time an aged nun was given charge of him. Whenever the patient began to argue on religion, the Sister would change the subject at once. She refused to be drawn into any disputes. The nun's attitude piqued him sorely in the beginning but her attention and consideration were so uniformly courteous that the invalid could not justly complain. After the lapse of some weeks the man's mind slowly turned from the consideration of dogmatics, and quite naturally paused to consider the care and charity he was receiving from the hands of the aged Nun. Gradually he became more subdued, more reticent. Finally he surrendered to his nurse in these words: "Sister, I cannot seem to comprehend the disputes of learned men but I can understand the example of a fervent Christian life dedicated to the care of the sick. The Church that can produce such heroines as you must of necessity be the true one, and I am glad to have the blessed privilege of returning to the Fold, a sadder but wiser soul."

It may appear an unusual remark but it is nevertheless true, that the more we meditate on the understandableness of Christ, the clearer

concepts we have on the justice and mercy of God. Generally speaking, men regard their fellow men as so many icebergs. They judge them by what they see on the surface and take little or no account of the hidden currents and cross currents which draw them hither and yon. Not so the Lord. He sees everything, and having understanding in an infinite degree only He can pass unerring judgments. Thus, when a man is suddenly struck down in his sins, without any apparent opportunity to repent, let not our comments on such an ending be the comments of thoughtless men—let us not fancy that such an unfortunate soul was harshly dealt with. Not at all! "Thou art Just, O Lord, and Thy judgments right." It is the old question of the icebergs again. Only God can completely perceive the malice, the obstinacy, the shamefulness of certain acts—only God can decide just where mercy ends and justice begins.

On the other hand, too, it is understanding which gives us the privilege of glimpsing in a faint, incomplete way the mercy of God. We are very apt at times to be impatient with God's manner of treating human beings. He is so long-suffering, so loathe to take sinners at their word.

Of course He is, for is not His mercy above all His works? Assuredly! But then, too, God sees the many palliating circumstances of sins as we never can. When the Good Shepherd went out into the desert after the lost sheep His thoughts, I am sure, were not thoughts of punishment but of compassion. "Poor, deluded creature," He might easily have remarked, "did you not know it to be extremely dangerous apart from the rest of the flock? There are brambles and thorns and precipices where you might readily have come to your death. Wolves, too, abound, and it is not difficult at all for them to ensnare a stupid thing like you. Do be more careful next time." In other words, the sinner travels a long road before he becomes utterly vicious, utterly malicious, and the good God, more than anyone else, recognizes this.

To ponder, then, upon the understanding Heart of Christ, like meditating on the mercy of God, is not by any means time lost. It is time well spent. It brings out the best, the noblest in man. A coward requires a spur; a thoroughbred, a word of encouragement, a smile of understanding. A man may readily fight an enemy, but it is

not cricket to strike a friend, especially an understanding friend. And such is Christ. Pondering, then, thoughtfully over this attribute of the Savior's, we sooner or later succumb to His influence as did Zacchæus of old. We quickly begin to consider things from His viewpoint, from His place of vantage.

I particularly recall a story of an Italian bandit who had broken just about every commandment of the Decalogue. Disgusted with him, his own men turned on him one night and left him for dead in a lonely spot on the mountains. A priest was hurriedly summoned and he found the man in a semiconscious frame of mind. The priest, holding the dying man's hand, whispered in his ear to repent of his sins and to press his hand as evidence that he understood the words addressed to him. The old padre thought he felt a slight effort and so gave him absolution. Four days later they buried the bandit. The priest, returning home from the service, was about to pass beneath the cemetery gate. Over the entrance was a Crucifixion Group as is often seen in burial places in Europe. Just then the altar boy said to the priest: "It didn't

cost that man much to get to heaven. All he had to do was to press your hand." "Ah, no!" replied the old Levite, "it cost him much more"—and pointing to the Crucifix—"it cost him the Blood of God."

The priest was looking on things from the standpoint of Christ. So do we—when we understand Christ.

IX

A LOVING FRIEND

It is certainly pathetic in the extreme to gaze out on the world today and watch the vast majority of the youth of our land rushing headlong to their own moral destruction. And all this principally because of a wrong concept of the word, "love." Parents carefully watch the diet of their offspring, but the mental pabulum our children eat is given no thought or supervision. We know full well that the quality of food assimilated into the body reacts on the entire system. Calories are needed more in one individual, vitamins in another. And so the utmost precaution is taken to give the body what it needs most for its physical well-being.

We are also thoroughly aware that man does not live by bread alone—that there is a higher life within us that needs sustenance as well as the animal existence which is ours. But this knowledge we possess appears not to disturb us in the least. We endeavor, in fact, to ignore it entirely. And thus at the most important crossroad of life—when the body waxes strong and

passion begins to assert itself—at this crisis we allow our young to batten upon foul things—we permit them to peruse lurid stories, vile magazine articles, unwholesome novels, and then, strange to say, are astonished when they show the results of such food in the moral debacle which inevitably follows. We pretend not to notice when our boys and girls have been cozened by a dream of pleasure, when they have taken to their bosoms snakes, vipers, and then, forsooth, appear surprised when the vipers awaken and sting them. It is dangerous enough to drop a match by the greenwood, but to cast a spark near tinder, prepared, athirst, as it were, for the flame is downright folly. And yet parents are carelessly following this identical course of procedure; and when the conflagration occurs, they smile knowingly and dub the *affaire de coeur* by the sacred name of "love." Could anything be more degrading, more detrimental to the future generation? I think not.

Pacifists in this country are daily agitating the abolition of all toys which by their use will awaken in the breast of the child thoughts and notions about the glories of war. Toy cannons, tin soldiers—these are taboo. The panoply of

conflict must be rigidly excluded from the curriculum, and in its place harmless games are to be substituted. No matter what our thoughts may be as to the relative merits or demerits of Pacifism, the theory they advocate is logical and sound at the core. As the child is taught, so shall the man be. Only when we have eradicated the root of the evil—only when we have thrown into the discard, into the ash heap, the vile novels of the day and replaced them by interesting biographies and stories of the saints—only then may we expect to eliminate the widespread evil and bring back youth to a true idea of the glorious meaning of the sacred word "love." When that desired time arrives, then there will be no dearth of vocations. Then will the mountains leap with gladness. Boys and girls with the joyful insouciance of adolescence will flock to the altar and the cloister because they will be intimately convinced that "it is better to give than to receive."

Love, then, is a giving, not a receiving. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, and the Son so loved us that He gave Himself for our salvation." Love is a sharing, an interchanging of gifts, and we give in proportion to our love. Hence we find that

Christ loved us to the end—to the limit. "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends." He shares with us the doctrines He promulgated. Not alone have we His words in the New Testament but the Church He founded preaches "Christ and Him crucified." She is as an immense cable transmitting the message the Master spoke. A cable cannot garble a message; it cannot magnify or minimize it. It can only transmit it. So we, the children of today, enjoy the selfsame words of Christ—we participate in the Sacraments He instituted as truly as did the close followers of Christ during His sojourn here below. What a drab, bleak world this would have become had not the Master deigned to sanctify it with His Presence! There would be no Bethlehem, no Garden of Olives, no Calvary, no Mary, no Joseph—no hope, no light. Nothing but darkness and despair. And thus, Christ, being God and knowing how very, very much His presence means to His friends on earth—being God, He stays with us. And lest we might, like the Centurion, be afraid to ask Him to come into our home—lest we might be repulsed by His majesty, He hides Himself under the forms of bread and

wine. "Emmanuel—God with us!"—exclaimed the Hebrews at the birth of Christ. Today in the same way we can exclaim in an ecstasy of amazement and wonder: "God with us!" Here He dwells as He did of old in the towns and hamlets of Galilee. Here on our altars He has His little crib just as He had at Bethlehem. A few little groups of the humbler folk come, as the shepherds did in bygone days, and make their obeisance to the Infant King. They, too, hear at times heavenly music just as those watchers did on that eventful night in the Cave. Here, too, He leads the hidden life of Nazareth, teaching the world that age-old lesson of the beauty and the charm of seclusion and obedience. Just as He promptly did the behests of Mary and Joseph, so today, He obeys with equal alacrity the wishes of His priests. And this as an example to a world which says now as Lucifer did of old: "I will not serve!" That world which believes only in license and has entirely forgotten that "obedience is the perfect law of liberty."

Christ's public life, too, is daily enacted over again on the altar throne of our churches. Here He welcomes and smiles upon the little children and warns their parents not to scandalize them.

Here He gives sight to the blind. Here He says to the sinful leper: "Go show yourself to the priest." Here He raises the dead to life and turns them over to their mother—the Church. Here He cures, heals, encourages, admonishes, just as of yore. To this one: "Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee!" To that one: "What is that to you? You follow Me." To a third: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and its glory and all other things shall be added unto thee." Verily we have no reason to yearn for a return of those halcyon hours when Christ dwelt on earth. God is with us—Emmanuel is still here!

In the tabernacle also, the Lord lives again His dolorous days. Here as then is lonesomeness, the thoughtlessness, the carelessness, the ingratitude of men. "There had stood One in the midst of you Whom you knew not"—Whom you cared not to know, Whom you ignored, despised. . . . "He came unto His own and His own received Him not——Couldst thou not watch one hour?" It is the age-old, the eternal pulsating of the Heart of Christ for the love of His creatures. He created us; He fashioned the world wherein we live; He endowed us physically, mentally, supernaturally; everything we have belongs to

Him. And He only asks that we freely give back again that which belongs to Him anyway by every title under the sun. It is a small request, such a pitiable little tribute to require, that a generous heart will give it gladly, joyfully. He will give it all the more readily, too, because this lovable Friend of ours was always so punctilious, so prompt to pay all the little things men may have thought He owed them, even when, as a matter of fact, He did not.

"And when they were come to Capharnaum, they that received the didrachmas, came to Peter and said to him: 'Doth not your Master pay the didrachmas?' He said: 'Yes.' And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying: 'What is thy opinion, Simon? The kings of the earth, of whom do they receive tribute or customs? Of their own children, or of strangers?' And he said: 'Of strangers.' Jesus said to him: 'Then the children are free. But that we may not scandalize them, go to the sea, and cast in a hook: and that fish which shall first come up, take: and when thou hast opened its mouth, thou shalt find a stater: take that and give it to them for Me and thee.' "

This tribute to Christ requires very little on

our part. We have only to do what every real human being should do—keep his hands clean. As little tots whenever we sat down to dinner, a gentle voice (now long since stilled) would quietly inquire. "Are your hands clean?" If they were, all was well. If not, we had to leave our chairs forthwith and go out to wash those same offending hands. All through the years I recall the incident. And almost unconsciously, when approaching the Heavenly Banquet, I ask myself the selfsame question. "Are your hands clean?" We cannot sit down at the Lord's Table unless they are—we must have on that indispensable wedding garment, or else we must expect to be cast out into exterior darkness. We must be in the state of grace. "If you love Me, keep My commandments." These commandments are not difficult; they are according to, not against, the finer instincts of man. . . . "My yoke is sweet and my burdens light." The commandments are the shortest code of laws in existence by which the individual, the family, the nation, and civilized society may be safely governed. And so, when Christ asks us individually and collectively to observe these commandments, He is

simply begging us to consider our own happiness and welfare. Both are wrapped in the observance of the law of God. Let us not deceive ourselves. There are more kinds of war than that waged by rifle and cannon. This furor for peace will amount to nothing so long as there is internal strife in the hearts of men. "Peace, peace, and there is no peace!" No one gives what he has not. Peace cannot come from souls filled with unhappiness and unrest. Eugenists are popular today, for it is an age which focuses its attention on the body —on physical perfection. "Cleanliness," they say "is next to godliness." All very well! But let us always bear in mind it is only *next*. There is moral cleanliness which not only is *next* but actually *is* godliness. I refer, of course, to the code of Moses and the Prophets which Christ came not to destroy but to fulfill. In these laws we have a mental hygiene, a moral antiseptic that will purify the intellects of men. They fumigate the soul of all malodorous strife and friction, and prepare the way for happiness, joy, and peace. Hence, the Christ, in requesting a concrete expression of our love for Him, is in reality doing us a double favor—He is giving us hap-

piness here below in peace of heart, and happiness hereafter in the possession of His everlasting friendship and love.

Besides a general voicing, then, of our regard for Christ in the keeping of His commandments, it is very expedient that we occasionally visit and pay our respects to Him. When an earthly king, for instance, comes to town to sojourn in our midst, we not only show our good will in a generous welcome, but we take the opportunity to greet him personally and perform our obeisance to him. We should act in the same way toward the Master. He lives in our midst—on the altars of our churches. Courtesy, then, requires that we often approach His humble throne and there tell Him what He longs to hear—"that we love Him." He is such a condescending King that it would not be at all out of place to beg Him to accept us as one of the pages of His retinue. And when the others have retired and you are alone, ask to be as attentive, as loyal, as true to Him as little Stanislaus was, as Agnes, Cecilia, and Philomena were. Rest assured He will accede to your request. But if He does not at once take you in among His chosen ones, do not be at all downhearted. It is only when we

are really hungry that we appreciate food, likewise it is only when we ardently and perseveringly desire the friendship of Christ, that He bestows this privilege upon us. Therefore, if you do not experience consolation in these visits—if He does not admit you as a knight or a page to the inner court, go out and perform sentry duty in the dark. You will find it strangely sweet to be on guard duty even if it be under trying conditions. The cold and rain will pass unobserved in the intimate conviction that the Master is close by even if He appears to sleep. Those night watches, too, will afford ample time to mourn for the past and to reconstruct the future. Those silent hours will be fruitful in noble thoughts and generous resolutions. We shall clearly perceive that true love best expresses itself in imitating the beloved, and that it is not presumptuous on our part to endeavor to reproduce in ourselves the virtues and characteristics of the highest Model of all—Christ Himself. We shall strive to copy His strength, His humility, His silence, His zeal, His courage in suffering, His amiability, remembering always that with His aid it is not difficult to succeed. Thus shall the hours of

desolation pass, and then—then the dawn. There is always a dawn even to the darkest night. Never think otherwise. The watcher hears a step behind. He turns and salutes. The king has paid him an unexpected visit. He whispers a few words to His loyal sentry. "Friend, go up higher!" The night watch is over.

The Lord acts in very much the same way as a modern executive. He proves those under Him—He winnows the true from the false. Only a coward resents "a trial by fire"; only an Ishmaelite who fancies the hands of the rest of mankind against him. A valiant soul will fight and will not whine. A valiant soul, no matter what unforeseen push he receives, falls on his feet like a grimalkin. He does not become discouraged and helpless like a turned turtle. The valiant man pushes steadily forward, remembering the old Indian legend that says when a man kills a foe the strength of the slain enemy passes into the victor's arm. Thus, too, after each encounter he emerges the stronger. It is well for us to recall this when it is a question of loving Christ. Love entails a certain degree of sacrifice, and that is why it is not very popular except with courageous souls. Cowards chiefly love

themselves. The real genuine article will stand up under all times and conditions—in fact, many waters cannot quench it. Take the story of Mary Magdalen as an illustration. She loved both wisely and unwisely.

In her youth she loved unwisely. After the death of her father and mother, she left Bethany and took up her abode in the summer home her parents had bequeathed to her in Magdala. Magdala is a small borough some three miles north of Tiberias, at the entrance to the plains of Genesereth. Travelers tell us that little now remains of the ancient town. But its site at the foot of a steep mountain upon the lake shore is very picturesque. The imagination can easily depict the gracious panorama once presented in this favored spot, where countless brooks and rills from the mountains kept alive the fertile orchards, the flowers, and luxuriant vegetation that made the land of Genesereth a veritable terrestrial paradise.

In this town, then, Mary took up her residence. With no loving parents to watch over her, surrounded by all the comforts wealth could command, gifted by unusual graces of body—a strikingly handsome face, a crown of marvelous

hair, a generous, kind disposition—considering all these things, is it any wonder that such an unprotected child should become ensnared? She joined fortunes with a gay, young army officer and lead a life of such unbridled indulgence that her conduct became identified with the city where she resided—even to this day she keeps the name Magdalen or Mary of Magdala.

To this town, then, Christ came one day, and, for some reason not known to us, accepted an invitation to dine with Simon, the Pharisee. We know the rest. Simon's reception of his illustrious Guest was rude and scarcely civil—he failed to give Christ the most ordinary marks of respect and friendship.

It was customary when entering a house as a guest, first to remove the sandals, almost as we are accustomed to remove our hats, and to leave them in the vestibule. The head of the family then kissed his guest upon the cheek saying, "Peace be to thee!" He then escorted him to a seat and servants came at once to bathe his feet. In warm countries where roads were thick with dust, this bathing was most refreshing. Afterwards a special servant or the master of the house himself anointed with fragrant oil the hair

and the beard of him to whom the welcome was accorded. Finally when the time came for the repast, the guest was given a chance to wash his hands. These ordinary courtesies were neglected by Simon.

It is soon noised abroad that the Wonder-Worker is in town and a large crowd followed Him to the home of Simon. The privacy we observe in our homes does not surround an Eastern feast. Orientals freely open the banquet hall to all the curious who desire to enjoy the sight. These come and go, and, while there, may listen to what is said, or even take part in the conversation.

The presence of these outsiders is even thought to add to the solemnity of the repast.

Among the crowd this day is one tired and disgusted with earthly amours. Many a time God's grace had whispered to her heart of another affection transcending all other loves, but the lowering faces of the Pharisees glared at her and discouraged her. "Away, away! Unclean! Unclean!" But she had heard of the kindness of Christ—she had heard the story of the Prodigal. Such mercy! For that boy who squandered his substance and degraded his name, when he re-

turned home, there was no reproach. Just a warm generous welcome. It seems only yesterday since she heard the words that set her heart on fire. "Come to Me all ye who labor and are heavily burdened and I will refresh you." Then the great resolution grips her. She will conquer self, subdue shame, ignore the cold glances of Simon. The icebergs of sin are melting before the warm glow of the Sacred Heart. She glides timidly to the door, looks in, and rivets her gaze on that all-pure, all-holy God. Then she turns her thoughts on her past life and the contrast sends tears of shame to her eyes. Will He repulse me? Will He command: "Depart from Me you cursed!" No! His gentle looks ravish her soul. Thus, she summons courage and passes into the banquet hall. Simon's guests start; they smother their rage. She sees it and bends her head to hide her confusion. Her rich tresses fall over her face. Hot tears are now falling in abundance. The fountains of the great deep have broken up within her soul. She sinks at the feet of Christ and clasps them. "I have found Him Whom my soul loveth: I held Him and I will not let Him go." Taking a box, she breaks its fragrant aromatics over the Savior's feet and with her bright locks of

gold she wipes not only the feet of Christ but the crimes of a lifetime away.

In gazing on this tableau of heavenly love, it were well for us to keep in mind the bravery of Mary. Her former defeats were forgotten—they were made stepping-stones to higher things. We can do likewise. We can love Christ as Mary did even to Calvary. "Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus, His Mother, and His Mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen."

X

AN EVERLASTING FRIEND

The instability and brevity of our earthly existence is a favorite theme with authors both sacred and profane. Solomon uses this topic as a prelude to the Book of Ecclesiastes: "What hath a man more of all his labor, that he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away and another generation cometh—Vanity of vanities and all is vanity." Xerxes, too, furnishes an excellent tableau anent the subject. As his glorious troops are parading before his eyes, in the midst of the anabasis of the famed Persian army, the general, forsooth, breaks down and weeps like a child. Asked the cause of the tears, Xerxes replies that a hundred years from now not one of that valiant troop will be alive, and this thought depressed him exceedingly. In the liturgy of the Church this idea is also constantly stressed. Even at the coronation of a Pope a little sheaf of flax is ignited, and, as the smoke rises heavenward, the choir sings: "*Sic transit gloria mundi* —so passes the pomp of the world." Still,

despite the many examples we have to the contrary, we seldom become thoroughly convinced of the shortness of life. Such-and-such a person (we say) has not long to live. Mr. So-and-So will die soon, but for you and for me, it is going to be different. We expect in a vague, indefinite sort of way to weather the storm—we erroneously imagine, as did the friends of St. John, "that we shall remain until He comes." This illusion, moreover, appears to increase as the years glide by. Just a short time before his death, the late Secretary of War, Mr. Good, was visited by the President. Newspaper despatches quoted the dying man as saying to Mr. Hoover. "I have never lost a fight yet and I am not going to lose this one with death." Of course, the words may have been employed just to demonstrate the invalid's spirit of resistance toward the onslaught of disease. If so, all well and good. Yet, since so many, while not actually voicing sentiments similar to the above, live as though they had actually uttered them, it might be well to remind ourselves that the most sonorous sentences in the Bible are those which treat about death. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction come, and the years

draw nigh of which thou shalt say: 'They please me not.' Before the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars be darkened, and the clouds return after the rain. When the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall stagger, and the grinders shall be idle in a small number and they that look through the holes shall be darkened. And they shall shut the doors in the street, when the grinder's voice shall be low, and they shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall grow deaf. And they shall fear high things, and they shall be afraid in the way, the almond tree shall flourish, the locust shall be made fat, and the caper tree shall be destroyed: because man shall go into the house of his eternity, and the mourners shall go round about in the street. Before the silver cord be broken, and the golden fillet shrink back, and the pitcher be crushed at the fountain, and the wheel be broken upon the cistern, and the dust return into the earth from whence it was, and the spirit return to God Who gave it."

It is this certainty of death which hampers and discourages human friendships. Like a sword of Damocles it hangs over every head, and we know not when nor how it will fall. Francis

Borgia, loyal and true to his queen, suffered a rude awakening at the demise of Isabella. Accompanying the funeral cortege and obligated by his office to identify the remains, he is dumbfounded at the ravages of death. He can hardly persuade himself that the helpless, decaying mass of inertia before him once housed the spirit of his queen, and hagiographers tell us that there at the bier of Isabella, Borgia swore never more to serve a monarch subject to death.

However, it is not alone from the approach of death our friendships suffer. Friendships famish and die of hunger because of our own inconstancy. "Time changes," sang the poet, but he also added, "and we change, too, with time." Here is the heel of Achilles, the vulnerable spot in our earthly associations. Not only is the world about us given to kaleidoscopic changes, but we ourselves are shifting daily as respects our physical, intellectual, and moral outlook on things. As a consequence, we do not view from the same coign of vantage the little dramas which occur daily, hence dissention, misunderstandings, quarrels, and finally, the end of what we once foolishly imagined was a lifelong affinity. We visit the graves of our dead, yearly, on Memorial

Day, and leave there a little floral remembrance. The custom is a praiseworthy one and deserves encouragement. But I have fancied it would entail endless labor did we have to leave a remembrance upon the many tombs where friendships lie buried. The number would be so great that in all probability our task would never end. It is this perpetual flux and reflux which discourages permanency in our relations with the neighbor. Like the tides of the sea there is continual ebbing and flowing. And it is the realization of this unpropitious element in human affairs that leads noble souls to treat earthly associations at their worth and strive to link their lives with One in Whom there is no change or even semblance of mutability.

The Friendship of Christ, then, is not a luxury —something we can do without. It is a dire necessity in the lives of thinking men and women. It is just as important to our spiritual welfare as bread is to our physical well-being. Only more so. For besides possessing all the attributes of an ideal earthly companion, He, being God, is immune from any blemish—especially the defect of changeableness. The majority of us are as weather vanes, shifting and turning with every

variable wind—we must be approached cautiously—if at all. Thus, our associates watch carefully for the danger signals—a frown, a quick retort, a curt rejoinder. The word is passed along that the chief is not in good humor, and not only are no favors asked on that day, but all are on guard lest the chief turn Iroquois and take to the war-path. On other occasions, when indications are more propitious, we venture closer, we endeavor to establish friendlier relations, yet always we are on the *qui vive* for a hint of resentment, a sign of hauteur which will immediately preclude further intimacy. Thus it is to a greater or less extent with every human being. Now we are volatile, effervescent, then, depressed, dismayed, discouraged.

But with Christ there is no need of studied diplomacy to obtain a favor. He is ever disposed to receive us. Adversity does not sour Him nor does prosperity render Him forgetful of His friends. They are always welcome and assured of His entire attention. Seldom do we ponder on this phase of Christ's amiability—seldom do we appreciate it as we should. St. Ignatius, in his book, *The Spiritual Exercises*, proposes for our consideration a meditation called The King-

dom of Christ. It is cleverly developed, inspirational, and generally succeeds in firing the retreatant with renewed zeal in the service of our Heavenly King. Nevertheless it is—when all is said and done—only a similitude. All contrast, as rhetoricians admonish us, is imperfect. This is doubly true in the matter of the changeless Friendship of Christ: While contrast may serve to bring out the defects of human affinities and personalities, it does not and cannot faithfully describe those positive winsome traits which render Christ "beautiful above the sons of men." There is but one way by which we may truly estimate these qualities in Christ—by actually experiencing what His Friendship means. "*Gustate et videte*—taste and see that the Lord is sweet." It is only by enjoying the Christ that we at last come to appreciate Him as we should.

At this juncture takes place that marvelous transformation in souls so astonishing to those interested in such phenomena. That time-worn adage, "tell me with whom you go and I will tell you what you are," is true in spiritual matters as well as in social affairs. Imperceptibly, almost unconsciously, we begin to copy our associates.

This happens also in our friendship with the Savior. Gradually, as St. Paul expresses it, we "put on" Christ—we imitate His ways, we see things from His point of view. Hence it is that ardent lovers of the Master slowly yet surely become like Him—unchangeable. Like the North Star they become so fixed in their orbit that others even use their example of steadfastness to guide themselves to a port of safety. Goldsmith very graphically expresses this immutability of soul in his description of the Village Preacher.

"As some tall cliff that lifts its
awful form,
Swells from the vale, and midway
leaves the storm,
Though round its breast the rolling
clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

Companionship with Christ, however, signifies much more than the attribute of unchangeableness. It likewise means that we possess an everlasting Friend. Nor has death, the grim destroyer, any power to break this sacred bond.

It is the only link, in fact, that we can forge here below which is impervious to earthly attacks, and at the same time it spells open sesame to the joys of heaven. To begin, it is proof against the ravages of time. So long as we do not deliberately turn from Christ, He will never forsake us. He will protect us, guard us—He will be a veritable sword. Yes, in history, sacred and profane, we read of a sword as being an insignia of friendship. In Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* we read of a marvelous one which was given to King Arthur.

> . . . "For thou rememberest how
> In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
> Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
> Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
> Holding the sword—and how I rowed across
> And took it, and have worn it, like a king."

In the annals of Richard the Lion-hearted, we learn that he alone could wield a sword six feet long. In the Old Testament God gives Judas Machabeus a sword and commands him: "Take this sword by which thou shalt conquer the enemies of My people Israel."

It is a wonderful comfort to know intimately

that Christ is defending us, guarding us from every evil—that we may rest securely in Him as little children in the arms of our mother. It does not mean, of course, that we shall not experience troubles, trials, crosses. These are in the very make-up of our being. Man born of woman is destined to suffering and yet in its final analysis suffering is not an evil; it is a punishment. Only sin may be considered as an evil, since it is deliberate disobedience of the law of God.

The friendship of Christ means walking with Christ. Oftentimes in the Old Testament we read of how the patriarchs and the prophets walked with God. When Moses came down from the mountain after conversing with his Maker, the Israelites could scarcely gaze upon his countenance because of its brightness, its glory. Nor need we wonder at this. I have witnessed the same phenomenon in this our day. I have walked into the room of a homely old missionary and have discovered him kneeling in the middle of the floor with arms outstretched, utterly oblivious of my presence. I have seen his face aglow with that light of which the Israelites spoke, and I have found it to be beauty—a reflection of

God's infinite beauty. And stupidly (for I should have stumbled on this truth years ago) I have discovered that beauty pays—pays in every way, financially, aesthetically. That promise of the Savior that all things shall be added to him who seeks first the Kingdom of God and its justice, is to be taken literally, not figuratively as some would have us do.

Some years ago a little group of financiers purchased sixty thousand acres of land in the San Fernando Valley in California. They developed it, subdivided some parts, and then placed prices on the subdivided land. After the retail price had been agreed upon, one of the principal investors began to ponder upon the market value of beauty, and sanely came to the conclusion that beauty would more than pay for itself. Against much opposition, he invested over half a million more in a strikingly beautiful boulevard some twenty-two miles long and about two hundred and fifty feet wide. Along this boulevard he planted trees, shrubbery, and roses; nor did he permit the modern wayside signs to be erected along the strip. So great was the demand for property abutting this avenue that real estate

values soared several million dollars above the original price decided upon. Beauty was paying dividends financially.

It gives big returns, too, aesthetically. To the majority of the motorists on that highway the roses do not appeal. They take them for granted as some did the primroses in Wordsworth's day. But one day I noticed a glorious exception. A poor Mexican in a rickety old cart, with three or four children tucked in behind, stopped by the road. His wife, who sat beside him in the driver's seat and who cradled an infant in her arms, wondered for a moment why he had brought the carriage to a standstill. Yet only for a moment did she appear nonplused. His errand soon dawned upon her. He stepped over to a rosebush, culled a few buds, brought them back, and presented them to his wife. His eyes danced their delight, and he whispered in soft dulcet tones: *Yo te amo cara mia.* A movie director would have given hundreds of dollars to have caught the light in that poor fellow's eyes as I did that day. It was like a picture out of the past, a page from the leaves of St. Francis. There by the side of the shimmering pavement, while richly-decked auto-

ists sped gayly by, nor paused to view the glorious vistas encountered on all sides—there in the heat of the noontime was enacted the sweetest act of *noblesse oblige* it was ever my good fortune to witness. It took a poor outcast, a despised Mexican to teach a pleasure-loving generation a much-needed lesson—the lesson that roses are not for December, for a memory—roses were not made only for dark days, for funerals, for times of sorrow. No! They were made for a greater end than that. They were made to render bright days brighter still.

It is so with the friendship of Christ. Ever so many people erroneously fancy that He is needed only when days are dark and hearts are bowed in grief, forgetting entirely that He is a God of the living rather than of the dead, that His first miracle was performed at a marriage feast and not over the bier of death. Is He not the Light of the world? Assuredly! Then it is only to be expected that they who walk with Him shall not walk in darkness, that the effulgence from His Countenance shall play also on them, that they, in a word, shall walk with beauty, with Divine Beauty, and as a consequence shall avoid the pit and the ditch.

In the lifetime of Christ, the Pharisees and scribes accused Him of many faults. And yet, though He associated occasionally with women, though He stooped down to the gutter to lift up the outcast, the prostitute, He nevertheless, was so practically sane in all His dealings with sinners that no one ever dared to charge Him with being in any way maudlin, sentimental, romantic. Even under stress of the deepest emotions—when hypocrisy was rampant and His simple, honest nature obliged Him to hold aloft this foul thing and expose it to the light of day—even in such crises, the Christ remains eminently practical, eminently just. Now this eminently sane Christ Who is likewise a God of infinite Truth, tells us deliberately of a land beyond the skies. He says He has a Kingdom to give away and that His friends shall share in this partition—that they shall reign as princes over principalities. This same Christ Who told us He would rise again, Who prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem, advises us "to rejoice and be glad because your reward will be great in heaven." It appears to be innate in the heart of man to believe in a surcease from toil and sorrow.

"I am going a long way
To the island-valley of Arilion;
Where falls no hail, or rain, or any snow.
Nor ever wind blows loudly, but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with
orchard-lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with
summer sea."

A recent poll of those accustomed to attend movie performances revealed the fact that almost three fourths of the number desired stories with happy endings. Christ wishes that our lives should have a happy ending, and in order to procure efficaciously this goal for us, He Himself willingly submitted to an unhappy ending.

When it is evening, you say, "it will be fair weather, for the sky is red." On Good Friday the sun went down blood-red—on that blessed day the Savior won for us the privilege of a glorious voyage with fair weather prevailing even up to our arrival in port. What more could we ask?

Today, November 29, happens to be the vigil of St. Andrew, Apostle. And as I pen these lines the Epistle of the day vividly flashes before me.

How curious Andrew and John became, when they first met the Master, to discover just where He dwelt! And how overjoyed they were when the Savior answered. "Come and see!" They came, of course, and delighted with the company of Christ they returned the next day and brought along the great Simon Peter. There in a few words you have the complete record of the Church—a few enthusiasts giving themselves to Jesus and then bringing along others who, in turn, bring in still more. Twenty centuries have passed since that invitation was first extended, and all history is inclosed in the acceptation or rejection of those words of welcome: "Come and see!"

One of these days, when the shadows lengthen and the noisy world is hushed, Christ will beckon to us through the gates of death: "Come and see!" Then shall the friendship of Christ be appreciated as it really should—then shall not only our lips repeat but from our heart of hearts shall reëcho those old, old words of Ecclesiasticus, "We shall say much and yet shall want words, but the sum of our words is, He is all." Yes, He is Jesus, "My Friend of Friends."

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